

# Agenda

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## Scrutiny Committee

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Tuesday 8 October 2024**

Time: **6.00 pm**

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

**For further information** please contact:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

☎ 07485 309899

✉ [DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk)

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## **Committee Membership**

Councillors: Membership 12: Quorum 4 substitutes are permitted.

Councillor Katherine Miles (Chair)

Councillor Tiago Corais (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan

Councillor Chris Jarvis

Councillor Dr Amar Latif

Councillor Sajjad Malik

Councillor Edward Mundy

Councillor Simon Ottino

Councillor Asima Qayyum

Councillor Dianne Regisford

Councillor Mike Rowley

Councillor Anne Stares

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

	<b>Pages</b>
<b>1 Apologies for absence</b>	
<b>2 Declarations of interest</b>	
<b>3 Chair's Announcements</b>	
<b>4 Minutes</b>	7 - 14
<p>Minutes from 3 September 2024</p> <p><b>Recommendation:</b> That the minutes of the meeting held on 3 September 2024 be APPROVED as a true and accurate record.</p>	
<b>5 Work Plan and Forward Plan</b>	15 - 18
<p>The Work Plan is driven to a very large extent by the Cabinet Forward Plan, a summary of which is attached. The Scrutiny Committee agrees its priorities for items coming onto the Forward Plan, which then form part of its Work Plan.</p> <p>The Committee is recommended to confirm its agreement to the Work Plan, or agree any amendments as required.</p>	
<b>6 Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings</b>	19 - 28
<p>At its meeting on 11 September 2024, Cabinet considered the following reports from Scrutiny and made responses to the recommendations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Anti-Social Behaviour</li><li>• Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Charter/Pledges – Annual Update</li></ul> <p>Since the Scrutiny Committee's previous meeting on 3 September 2024, the following Panels have met:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Finance and Performance Panel (4 September 2024)</li></ul>	

- Climate and Environment Panel (10 September 2024)

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Note** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.
2. **Note** any updates from Panel meetings.

## **7 Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review**

29 - 66

Cabinet, at its meeting on 16 October 2024, will consider a report from the Head of Corporate Strategy seeking approval for the LGA Corporate Peer Review Action Plan Update and Progress Review Feedback. Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer have been invited to present the report and answer questions. The Committee is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.

## **8 Dates of future meetings**

### **Scrutiny Committee**

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

### **Standing Panels**

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

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

Climate & Environment: 20 November 2024; 26 February 2025; 27 March 2025

**All meetings start at 6.00 pm.**

## **Information for those attending**

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- To follow the protocol which can be found on the Council's [website](#)
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- 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.
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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.

\*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.

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## Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 3 September 2024



### Committee members present:

Councillor Miles (Chair)	Councillor Altaf-Khan
Councillor Fry ( <i>substitute for Councillor Ottino</i> )	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Latif	Councillor Malik
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Qayyum
Councillor Stares	

### Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Clayton Lavallin, Economic Development Team Leader  
Emma Coles, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Manager  
Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager  
Laura Jones, Safeguarding Coordinator  
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer  
Celeste Reyeslao, Committee and Member Services Officer

### Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Partnership Working  
Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies  
Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for A Safer Oxford

### Apologies:

Councillor(s) Corais, Ottino and Regisford sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

## 21. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

## 22. Chair's Announcements

The Chair announced to the Committee that this would be Alice Courtney's final meeting as Scrutiny Officer for Oxford City Council. She expressed heartfelt thanks to Alice for her dedication and invaluable contributions over the years. In the interim, the Chair advised members to direct any Scrutiny-related queries to the [Democratic Services](#) inbox until a successor was appointed.

## 23. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the informal remote meeting held on 02 July 2024 as a true and accurate record.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the following actions had been completed since the informal remote meeting on 02 July 2024:

- An update report on online payments system rollout had been scheduled into the Work Plan for February 2025.
- The comparative work between the Corporate Strategy 2020-24 and Corporate Strategy 2024-28 had been circulated to the Committee and also included as a minutes supplement for the July 2024 meeting.
- The follow-up report which was requested as part of a recommendation in 2023/24 on the Leisure Services Contract Award had been scheduled into the Work Plan for November 2024. This report would also include a progress review of implementation of the Leisure Investment Programme as requested by the Committee at its last meeting. Updates on the Leisure Investment Programme would follow again in June and November 2025, at which point the requirement for further ongoing updates could be reviewed by the Committee.
- Scrutiny-commissioned items for 2024/25 had been scheduled into the Work Plan as follows:
  - Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) – September 2024 (overview presentation), October 2024 (ASB Policy Review – early look), January 2025 (ASB Policy pre-Cabinet)
  - Business Rates Non-Payment and Systems Management – December 2024 (Finance and Performance Panel)
  - Report back on arrangements from Leisure Contract Award – November 2024
  - Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery – March 2025
  - Tourism – April 2025
- Information was circulated to the Committee on 15 August 2024 in relation to the query about grass mowing/verge management at the previous meeting, which had also been included as a minutes supplement for the July 2024 meeting.
- The Scrutiny Officer had produced a recommendation tracker, which was included in the agenda pack for consideration later in the meeting.

*The Committee agreed to consider items 8, 9 and 10 next on the agenda, followed by items 5, 6, 7 and 11.*

## 24. Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Charter/Pledges - Annual Update

Clayton Lavallin, Economic Development Team Leader introduced the report from the Executive Director (Development) which provided a year one update against the Council's pledge commitments as part of the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter. He highlighted Oxford City Council's positive performance in the year-one audit, noting that whilst the Council had initially agreed to adopt 13 of



the 39 OIEP pledges, the audit showed that progress had been made on 35 of the 39 pledges in the past year. Despite fiscal constraints and reduced capacity, no decline in progress was reported compared to the previous year, with significant improvements driven by the People Team, as well as notable progress in the Council companies.

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies noted that ODS had successfully recruited 15 to 20 apprentices, emphasising the importance of widening the employee base through apprenticeships. He explained that a key goal of these apprenticeships was to diversify recruitment, especially by reaching out to underrepresented areas of Oxford, with a focus on increasing gender and minority representation.

Cllr Susan Brown, Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, acknowledged the significant contributions of the Economic Development Team and the OIEP. She highlighted that the formation of the pledges and charter was central to the Council's goal of driving a more inclusive economy. She emphasised the importance of the Council setting an example as an inclusive employer and noted that the Council was in the early stages of reintroducing the work experience programme, acknowledging the challenges of hybrid working in relation to reintroducing the scheme. She noted that the Council was focused on making significant strides in addressing inequalities and building a more diverse workforce that better reflected the community.

Emma Coles, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Manager had also been invited to speak on the item and answer questions.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The initial 13 pledges were chosen based on the assessment that they could be delivered effectively within existing resources and capacity. The approach was to start slowly and steadily to ensure consistent progress, with the hope of increasing the number of pledges in future years.
- Data was currently obtained from the leads of various participating services or organisations. However, the data had not yet been fully disaggregated.
- It was not feasible to enforce the requirement for all Council suppliers to pay the Oxford Living Wage within contracts, as some contracts were with businesses outside of Oxfordshire and it was determined unfair to expect those suppliers to pay the Oxford Living Wage. These cases were relatively few, however the Council ensured that the national living wage was met in all instances.
- The Council's procurement policies required a high number of local employers to be included in contracts. Continued efforts were being made to encourage local businesses to meet Oxford Living Wage standards, participate in Council contracts and increase their contributions to the local economy.

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

1. That the Council reviews the complete list of OIEP pledges and commits to additional pledges where it is advancing practices or meeting the requirements of pledges not currently committed to, to ensure that the Council's pledge commitments are aligned to existing and advancing organisational practices.
2. That the Council includes quantitative data in future OIEP Charter/Pledges annual update reports to evidence progress, including the use of disaggregated

data on apprenticeships and SME Council suppliers to enable more detailed interrogation of the figures.

*Cllr Susan Brown, Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies, Clayton Lavallin, Economic Development Team Leader and Emma Coles, OIEP Manager left the meeting and did not return.*

## **25. Annual Safeguarding Report 2023/24**

Cllr Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford introduced the report from the Executive Director (Communities and People) presenting the Safeguarding Annual Report 2023-24. She highlighted that annual audits were reviewed by the Safeguarding Board and Sub-groups, with actions informing training, communication, and the annual safeguarding action plan. Referrals to statutory agencies were recorded using MyConcern when the threshold was met, reflecting the work of various Oxford City Council teams in preventing and addressing safeguarding issues.

Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager, and Laura Jones, Safeguarding Coordinator, added that the report showcased the Council's comprehensive efforts in effectively safeguarding vulnerable adults and children. The implementation of last year's Scrutiny Committee recommendations had improved safeguarding practices in terms of organisations which the Council provided grant funding to. The Committee was also advised that Council staff engagement with safeguarding practices was consistently ranking highest in Oxfordshire, reflecting the Council's broad commitment to safeguarding. Positive feedback from peer reviews further affirmed the Council's overall success of these initiatives.

*Cllr Altaf-Khan joined the meeting.*

During discussions, the Committee noted the following points:

- The commissioning and decommissioning of Floyd's Row services sat within Housing Services and was not directly related to this report. Community Safety Services remained actively involved in street outreach and addressing anti-social behaviour.
- In relation to migrants without right to remain, the Council facilitated support meetings around hotels housing homeless individuals, primarily single males. The issue of the recent upsurge of these individuals rough sleeping had been addressed. Whilst there were challenges in relation to individuals who had no recourse to public funds, the Council continued to work with Asylum Welcome to provide support. Detailed questions in relation to migrant homelessness should be directed to Housing Services.
- The Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) bed provisions during extreme weather were triggered by Met Office forecasts that accounted for both high heat and cold conditions. The use of forecasts as the trigger afforded partners a few days' notice to prepare. Questions related to data on the frequency of SWEP being triggered annually and predictive modelling were best directed to Housing Services.
- 85 Council staff had attended optional Domestic Abuse training, which was part of the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation. Although this training was promoted, it was not as relevant to some staff (e.g. some who are

not frontline), which would present a challenge in terms of making the training mandatory for all staff.

- Exploitation of vulnerable adults was noted in several areas, including drug dealers exploiting individuals through the "cuckooing" phenomenon, a trend observed nationwide. Adult sexual exploitation, particularly through brothels rather than street-based activity, was also reported. Although instances of domestic servitude remained relatively low, there had been a slight increase in cases, though these were difficult to report and uncover. The National Referral Mechanism (NRM) offered statistics on the nationalities of internationally trafficked individuals, with small but consistent numbers from the same countries.
- The identification of vulnerable tenants was an action within the safeguarding action plan for 2024/25 so would be a focus in future reports.

The Committee requested:

- That the safeguarding annual report continue to be brought to the Committee annually.
- That the Scrutiny-commissioned report on Adult Exploitation and Modern Slavery scheduled for March 2025 includes detail on exploitation and modern slavery in different sectors; and includes information on any joint working with the Council's Licensing Teams in response to reports of adult exploitation and/or modern slavery in licensed premises.

The Committee noted the report; there were no recommendations.

*Laura Jones, Safeguarding Coordinator left the meeting and did not return.*

## **26. Anti-Social Behaviour [presentation]**

Cllr Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford, introduced the presentation by emphasising the importance of tackling anti-social behaviour in the community, including environmental crimes such as littering and fly-tipping. She highlighted how these actions negatively impacted shared spaces and the overall quality of life in Oxford. Collaboration with local residents, businesses, and organisations was key to effectively addressing these issues and creating a cleaner, safer, and more harmonious community.

Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager delivered the presentation, noting that the presentation was a precursor to the Committee reviewing the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy later in 2024/25. A copy of the presentation slide deck is included in the minutes pack.

*Cllr Latif left the meeting and did not return.*

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The closure of certain recycling and waste facilities was supported due to the high quantity of fly-tipping occurring at these sites, especially in locations such as Ambassador Avenue in Cowley. The closure of these facilities had seen a significant reduction in fly-tipping at these locations.
- The Community Safety Service had strong working relationship with Oxford Direct Services (ODS), which handled street cleaning and evidence collection related to fly-tipping, and currently operated a joint project that allowed for early

identification of hotspots and gathering evidence. The [Report It](#) page on the Council's website streamlined communication between Council services and ODS.

- Enforcement in relation to 'anti-social cycling' was not within the remit of the Community Safety Service, as this was not defined as anti-social behaviour within the policy. Safety in relation to cycling was within the remit of the Council's Parks and Green Spaces Team, Oxfordshire County Council and/or the Police.
- In terms of rehousing and tenancy management, there were increasingly complex cases relating to individuals and households in temporary accommodation, general needs accommodation and the adult homeless pathway. Efforts were made to avoid evictions due to anti-social behaviour and the Community Safety Service worked jointly with Housing Services to identify vulnerable tenants and work with them to find mutually agreeable solutions.
- Safeguarding concerns should be recorded via MyConcern.
- The Council worked with Oxford Brookes University and the University of Oxford to address fly-tipping by students and/or HMO landlords, particularly during peak periods like move-out times. Student wardens played a role in raising awareness and reporting incidents.
- Noise complaints, which remained a significant issue, were managed by the Community Response Team. These complaints were triaged and handled through the Council's reporting system.
- The growing number of complex cases necessitated substantial resource allocation, particularly for relationship-building with vulnerable individuals as part of complex cases. This posed ongoing challenges in capacity management.

*Cllr Malik left the meeting and did not return.*

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

1. That the Council, in the context of budget-setting in future years, conducts a review of the future capacity challenges and resource implications of complex anti-social behaviour cases which the Community Safety Service manages or is involved in with partners.

The Committee requested:

- That the Budget Review Group, during consideration of 2025/26 budget proposals, considers bulky waste collection and weighs up the impact on the budget versus the environmental impact of providing/not providing this service.
- That the Scrutiny Officer relays the feedback from members of the Committee in relation to the Members Enquiry Form, availability of officer/team contact details and the Member induction process/support.
- That the Community Safety Service Manager circulates information to the Committee on the Anti-Social Behaviour sub-teams, including which team is responsible for what.

*Cllr Fry, Cllr Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager left the meeting and did not return.*

## **27. Work Plan and Forward Plan**

In response to a question from the Committee, the Scrutiny Officer clarified that the Work Plan provided a summary of items the Committee proposed to consider. There was no specific priority assigned to the order of the listed items.

The Committee agreed the Work Plan as set out in the agenda pack.

## **28. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings**

The Committee noted that on 10 July 2024, Cabinet considered recommendations related to three reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack:

- Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-28
- Leisure Investment Programme
- Update of Byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces

The Committee was informed that, following a request at the previous meeting, the Scrutiny Officer had produced a recommendation tracker which included all Scrutiny Committee recommendations to date since the beginning of the 2023/24 municipal year. The recommendation tracker had been included in the agenda pack. The Committee noted the recommendation tracker.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Housing and Homeless Panel had met on 03 July 2024 and considered four substantive items: 2024/25 Capital Programmes (HRA) Delegations; Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28; Temporary Accommodation Demand and Mitigations; and Housing Performance Monitoring Q4 2023/24. The Panel had wide ranging discussions on the reports but made no recommendations. The Panel had also agreed its Work Plan to 2024/25. The Finance and Performance Panel had met on 18 July 2024 and considered five substantive items: Strategic Review of Services Across Community Services Progress Update; Strategic Review of Services Provided by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) Progress Update; Comparative Analysis - Capital Slippage; Financial Outturn Report 2023/24; and Scrutiny Performance Monitoring. There were no recommendations agreed at this meeting. The Finance and Performance Panel had also held an extraordinary meeting on 27 August 2024 and considered two substantive items: the ODS Group Performance Report and the ODS Executive Pay and Executive Pay Policy. The Panel agreed four recommendations - two recommendations for each item.

## **29. Budget Review Group Scope**

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer reminded the Committee that at its first meeting of the municipal year in June 2024, the Committee established a Budget Review Group to examine the Council's budget proposals for 2025/26.

She explained that the membership of the Budget Review Group, agreed in June 2024, was identical to the membership of the Finance and Performance Panel: Cllr Fry (Chair), Cllr Jarvis, Cllr Smowton and Cllr Yeatman. The proposed scope was similar to that agreed in previous years; as were the dates and timeline proposed. A key change to note was the provisions for substitutes in exceptional circumstances, noting that Review Group Members should make every effort to attend meetings where possible. Members of the Review Group, relevant Standing Panels, the Cabinet Member and relevant officers had been consulted on the proposed dates.

The Committee was informed that since publication, officers had requested that consideration of the Capital Programme be restricted to the General Fund Capital Programme at the meeting on 07 January 2025, with some additional officers in attendance to answer any detailed questions; and that the HRA Capital Programme be considered at the meeting on 08 January 2025.

The Committee agreed the proposed scope with the proposed minor amendment set out above.

**30. Dates of future meetings**

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The Committee thanked Alice Courtney for her work as Scrutiny Officer and wished her the best for the future.

**The meeting started at 6:00 pm and ended at 8:10 pm**

**Chair .....**

**Date: Tuesday 8 October 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.*



# Proposed Scrutiny Work Schedule

October 2024 to December 2024

## October 2024 – confirmed reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	08 October	The Local Government Association: Corporate Peer Review Action Plan Update and Progress Review Feedback  Corporate Debt Policy  Anti-Social Behaviour Policy Review
Housing and Homelessness	10 October	Housing Complaint Handling Annual Report 2023/24  Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update

## November 2024 – provisional reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	04 November	Leisure Update  Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2025/26  OX Place – OCH(I)L Recovery Plan (SJVG report)  Thriving Communities Strategy Update
Housing and Homelessness	07 November	Housing Revenue Account 30-year Business Plan and Asset Strategy  HRA 5-year Investment Programme and Delivery Arrangements  Tenancy Engagement and Management  Furnished Tenancy Scheme
Climate and	20 November	Net Zero Masterplan

Environment		<p>Eco-moorings Project Update (and update on other fuel-related issues in relation to boating communities) [presentation]</p> <p>High-level challenges and constraints impacting on the deliverability of solar opportunities at Council car parks</p> <p>Local Nature Recovery Strategy</p>
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## December 2024 – provisional reports

Committee/Panel	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	02 December	<p>Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2023/24</p> <p>Equalities Update</p> <p>Council of Sanctuary Framework</p>
Finance and Performance	04 December	<p>Budget 2025/26</p> <p>Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025-26</p> <p>Review of the Council Tax Discretionary Reduction Policy</p> <p>Review of the Discretionary Hardship Relief Policy</p> <p>Integrated Performance Report Q2 2024/25</p> <p>Treasury Management Mid-Year Review – April to September 2024</p> <p>Business Rates Non-Payment and Systems Management</p> <p>Benchmarking report comparing the Council's Treasury Management function to other councils, including data on return on investment versus risk</p> <p>Briefing note – analysis of housing benefit subsidy issues and potential options</p> <p>Exempt Treasury Management Matters [discussion item]</p>



Housing and Homelessness Panel	TBC	Housing Performance Monitoring (2024/25 mid-year) Implementation of Refugee Resettlement in Oxford Housing Complaint Handling Performance (Q1 & Q2 2024/25) Housing First Update
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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 11 September 2024  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Anti-Social Behaviour

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Katherine Miles, Scrutiny Committee Chair
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Thriving Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2024-28
<b>Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix A</b>	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

## Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 03 September 2024 to consider an update on Anti-Social Behaviour. The Committee was recommended to receive a presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion; and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Lubna Arshad (Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford) and Richard Adams (Community Safety Service Manager) for attending the meeting to present and answer questions.

## Summary and recommendations

3. Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager delivered a presentation which provided an overview of the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour service, relevant legislation and how the Council addressed reports of Anti-Social Behaviour.

4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to fly-tipping by HMO landlords and students; littering associated with the closure of recycling facilities; anti-social cycling using illegal e-bikes; enforcement; partnership working; noise nuisance; governance and transparency in relation to which agencies/sub-teams had responsibility for different aspects of anti-social behaviour, including reporting mechanisms; and resourcing.
  
5. In response to questions, the Committee noted that a key challenge within the Community Safety Service was the management and resourcing of long-term complex cases, as these cases required a multi-agency response and intensive ongoing support and relationship building. This stretched the resources of the teams involved. As a result, the Committee agreed to recommend that future capacity challenges and resource implications should be explored during future budget-setting rounds.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council, in the context of budget-setting in future years, conducts a review of the future capacity challenges and resource implications of complex anti-social behaviour cases which the Community Safety Service manages or is involved in with partners.***

<b>Report author</b>	Alice Courtney
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	07483 010160
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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 03 September 2024 concerning Anti-Social Behaviour. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Agree?</i></b>	<b><i>Comment</i></b>
1) That the Council, in the context of budget-setting in future years, conducts a review of the future capacity challenges and resource implications of complex anti-social behaviour cases which the Community Safety Service manages or is involved in with partners.	Yes	The increasing number, and increasingly complex nature, of anti-social behaviour cases in the Council's housing stock, temporary accommodation provision and homeless pathways needs to be better understood and assessed against the capacity and skills of officers managing these cases.

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 11 September 2024  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership Charter/Pledges – Annual Update

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Katherine Miles, Scrutiny Committee Chair
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working; Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies; Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Business, Culture and an Inclusive Economy
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Strong, Fair Economy
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2024-28
<b>Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix A</b>	Draft Cabinet response to Scrutiny recommendations

### **Introduction and overview**

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 03 September 2024 to consider an annual update report on the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledges. The report was the first annual report setting out an organisational audit against the OIEP pledges; the report was in response to a recommendation of the Committee in on 04 July 2023 when the OIEP Charter/Pledges was presented prior to Cabinet approval in July 2023. The Committee was recommended to note and comment on the report and agree any recommendations.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown (Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working), Councillor Nigel Chapman (Cabinet

Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies), Clayton Lavallin (Economic Development Team Leader) and Emma Coles (OIEP Manager) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

### **Summary and recommendations**

3. Clayton Lavallin, Economic Development Team Leader introduced the report. The report provided an update on year one progress against the OIEP pledges and a full organisational audit against the complete list of possible pledges. This was in response to a previous recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on 04 July 2023.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the use of data to evidence progressing pledges; the importance of disaggregated data in showing progress towards specific pledges; and social value in procurement exercises, particularly in relation to the Oxford Living Wage.
5. In particular, the Committee noted that while the Council had only formally committed to thirteen pledges out of a possible thirty-nine, the Council had made significant progress against another of other pledges that it had not signed-up to. In response to questions, the Committee was advised that only thirteen pledges had been committed to as the Council knew it could deliver against them within existing resources. However, the Committee agreed that the Council should sign-up to additional pledges where it was already meeting and/or progressing the requirements of those pledges beyond the thirteen already committed to, as it would strengthen the Council's commitment to driving an inclusive economy.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council reviews the complete list of OIEP pledges and commits to additional pledges where it is advancing practices or meeting the requirements of pledges not currently committed to, to ensure that the Council's pledge commitments are aligned to existing and advancing organisational practices.***

6. The Committee also discussed the importance of quantitative data in demonstrating progress against the various pledge commitments; including the use of disaggregated data to allow the Committee to drill-down into the detail in areas such as apprenticeships and ownership of small and medium sized enterprise (SME) Council suppliers (e.g. understanding the demographics behind an overarching number). The Committee agreed that it would be helpful if quantitative and relevant disaggregated data was included in future annual reports.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council includes quantitative data in future OIEP Charter/Pledges annual update reports to evidence progress, including the use of disaggregated data on apprenticeships and SME Council suppliers to enable more detailed interrogation of the figures.***



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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 03 September 2024 concerning the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledges Annual Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1) That the Council reviews the complete list of OIEP pledges and commits to additional pledges where it is advancing practices or meeting the requirements of pledges not currently committed to, to ensure that the Council's pledge commitments are aligned to existing and advancing organisational practices.		Council Officers from Oxford City Council, Oxford Direct Services (ODS) and OX Place will work with Emma Coles, Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Manager to identify pledges that we have performed well against in our annual audit so that more information can be provided about them alongside the 13 existing pledge commitments. A prerequisite for including this information will be the capacity to easily report on this within existing resource.
2) That the Council includes quantitative data in future OIEP Charter/Pledges annual update reports to evidence progress, including the use of disaggregated data on apprenticeships and SME Council suppliers to enable more detailed interrogation of the figures.		Council Officers in the Economic Development Team will request in future reporting from Oxford City Council service leads and Organisations (OX Place, Oxford Direct Services (ODS)) that quantitative data be supplied for each of the respective pledges audited and (wherever possible) to emphasise the need for disaggregated data in respect of apprenticeships and Small to Medium Size Enterprises (SMEs). This data will then be presented alongside the annual audit for fuller analysis and consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 16 October 2024  
**Report of:** Head of Corporate Strategy  
**Title of Report:** The Local Government Association: Corporate Peer Review Action Plan update and Progress Review feedback.

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update the Cabinet on the Council's Action Plan based on feedback and recommendations from the Corporate Peer Review in July 2023; and the Progress Review feedback.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Well-run council
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2024 to 2028

<b>Recommendation(s):</b> That Cabinet resolves to:	
1.	<b>Note</b> the progress and updates in the Council's Action Plan update;
2.	<b>Note</b> the Local Government Peer Challenge feedback report, April 2024; and to;
3.	<b>Agree</b> that the remaining tasks in the Council's Action Plan be incorporated into the Council's ongoing work, which will be monitored to completion by the Council's Corporate Management Team.

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix 1	The Council's Action Plan.
Appendix 2	Oxford City Council Local Government Peer Challenge Progress Review feedback report, April 2024.

## Introduction and background

1. The Council invited in a Local Government Association (LGA) team to conduct a review in July 2023, and this was followed by a feedback report detailing the strengths of the Council, the issues considered, and areas for further improvement and key recommendations.
2. The review recognised the Council's commitment and success in a number of areas and was a highly positive report overall. There were ten recommendations for improvement, most around structures, focus and process, but one around IT infrastructure that had potential budgetary implications.
3. In response to the findings the Council started work early to start developing the Council's Action Plan (Action Plan).
4. This Action Plan was agreed by Cabinet in December 2023 and published in line with the LGA reporting timelines "within eight weeks of the CPC report's publication".

### **Update on the Council's Action Plan**

5. The Council's Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service proactively considered the recommendations of the Peer Review Team and started work early to start developing and delivering the Action Plan.
6. The Action Plan update is attached to this report as Appendix One. The Cabinet is asked to note the progress and updates in the Action Plan as of September 2024.
7. Officers recommend that any remaining tasks in the Action Plan (those not complete) be embedded in the Council's regular work and monitored to completion by the Council's Corporate Management Team. This will help the Council keep up the progress made and make these tasks a natural part of the Council's operations.

### **April 2024 Progress Review feedback**

8. On 9 April 2024, some of the LGA Peer Team returned to assess the progress made against their recommendations and the Action Plan.
9. The review was delivered in person and onsite and was held over a day, and facilitated by the LGA Peer Challenge Manager and Peer Team members:
  - Chief Executive, Lancaster City Council
  - Former Leader, Norwich City Council
  - Chief Operating Officer and s.151 Officer, Cornwall Council.
10. To help the Peer Team gain an understanding of the local issues before the review, the Council provided a short update position statement along with other relevant documents that the Council believed would be helpful for the Peer Team. This was provided three weeks before the scheduled review.
11. The position statement provided the Peer Team with a detailed progress update against all the recommendations and subsequent actions. It was an opportunity for the Council to set out the key issues, challenges and current thinking in relation to the Action Plan.
12. The Peer Team's findings included:

- Welcoming the “positive steps” taken to work with other key institutions to develop a shared vision for the future of Oxford, including creating the Oxford West End website, launching the Anchor Institutions Network in 2024 and piloting the co-location of health services in the Leys Pools and Leisure Centre
  - Praising the “innovative approach” of using developer contributions from the West End redevelopment to fund skills training at the local further education college
  - Commending the Council for showing “proactive leadership” by working closely with the new Regulator for Social Housing to improve Oxford’s council homes
  - Welcoming the better prioritisation and sequencing of building and ICT projects, and the Council’s new key performance indicators to monitor workstreams
  - Commending the Council’s financial management, noting the successful setting of a balanced four-year Medium-Term Financial Strategy
  - Welcoming the introduction of a new aspiring managers leadership programme to develop and retain talent within the council.
13. Following the Progress Review, the LGA provided a short feedback report that reflected the Council’s progress, provided examples of good practice and highlights the initial impact and outcomes. The feedback report is appended to this report at Appendix Two.
14. The LGA report said: “It was clear to the peer team that the council have positively engaged in the Corporate Peer Challenge process; taken onboard the peer review findings and have been thoughtful about the impact of the recommendations.”
15. Alongside the progress over recent months, many of the LGA’s recommendations have also been included in the Council Strategy 2024 to 2028, which was agreed at a meeting of Full Council (15 July 2024).
16. As part of ensuring an open and transparent process, the LGA [Progress Review feedback report](#) was published on the Council’s Website in line with the LGA reporting timelines.

### **Financial implications**

17. There are no financial implications for the Council arising from this report.

### **Legal issues**

18. There are no legal implications for the Council arising from this report.

### **Level of risk**

19. There are no risk implications for the Council arising from this report.

### **Equalities impact**

20. An Equalities Impact Assessment is not necessary for this report. Equalities Impact is intrinsically built into the Council’s policies and alongside the key strategies. The Council will continue to monitor equalities impact as programmes grow and develop.

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<b>Background Papers:</b> None	
1	<a href="#">Oxford City Council Local Government Peer Challenge Feedback report, July 2023</a>



# Appendix One

## Local Government Association Corporate Peer Challenge

### The Council's Action Plan update

(Following the 9 April 2024 progress review)



# Oxford City Council

## Our progress

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# Our progress

## Recommendation 1: Co-design shared outcomes

- Convene the city's anchor institutions to work together in developing shared outcomes and collectively drive how these are delivered and procured.

CO-DESIGN SHARED OUTCOMES			October 2024 & final update
Launch Oxford West End website – communicating our collective vision		<b>Complete</b>	The new Oxford West End website was launched in January 2024 <a href="#">Home - Oxford West End</a> .
Establish developer-led skills and employment working group, initially for the West End		<b>Complete</b>	Budget has been identified and the Council is now working with Oxford University Developments and other interested developers to scope and establish an approach.
Secure funding through Future Oxfordshire (FOP) Partnership for the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economic Partnership (OIEP) manager to continue progressing work streams		<b>Complete</b>	The OIEP Partnership Manager position is now permanently in the structure.
Continue to participate in the four FOP Advisory groups to shape initiatives and interventions		<b>Complete</b>	The Council have senior officer representatives on each group and Member representation across each of the advisory groups.
Engagement with Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust in the work they are doing to establish an Anchor Vision and anchor network allied to the OIEP		<b>Complete</b>	The Council held set-up discussions with Oxford University Hospitals and Oxfordshire County Council, and the Anchor Network was launched in February 2024 with an initial focus on procurement, employment and climate action.
Use Oxford Strategic Partnership (OSP) and its subgroups - Economic Growth Steering Board (EGSB), Zero Carbon Oxfordshire Partnership (ZCOP) – to inform development of our Corporate Strategy 2024-28		<b>Complete</b>	Corporate Strategy 2024-28 workshop sessions were held with the OSP, EGSB, ZCOP as well as the Oxford Children & Young People's Partnership, Communities Forum, Parish Councils Forum and other external stakeholders to inform development of the draft Strategy which is now out to public consultation.
Establish a delivery board for the City Centre Action Plan including agreeing terms of reference and members	December 2024	<b>Ongoing</b>	A cross-sector delivery board is in the process of being established.
Engage in the future of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) discussions to ensure the positive		<b>Complete</b>	Engagement with OxLEP is ongoing in respect of its new structure within the County Council. The Leader

CO-DESIGN SHARED OUTCOMES			October 2024 & final update
partnership working is continued in new model			remains a Director.
Embed the Delivery and Place Making officer and member partnership meetings to engage on key work streams affecting Oxford		<b>Complete</b>	A meeting cycle has been established and positive meetings are embedded on an ongoing basis.
Develop a Place and Movement Framework for City Centre and Northern Quarter	March 2025	<b>Ongoing</b>	The Council are represented on the project board and have joint officer working arrangements on this. The work continues to progress as a joint team between the City and County councils and stakeholder engagement has been taking place to inform the framework. The work is on track for completion for the target date.
Progress Full Business Case (FBC) and Infrastructure Place Study (IPS) to support proposals and investment bids for Cowley Branch Line (CBL)	March 2025 (IPS)	<b>Ongoing</b>	A Place framework for CBL is now commissioned and the work is on track for the target completion date.
Complete commission for Oxford Station Masterplan to identify refined options for engagement		<b>Complete</b>	This work is now complete. Work is being undertaken to embed the findings in other frameworks and strategy and to use the information to seek funding as part of wider lobbying.
Deliver co-location pilot with Oxford University Hospitals (OUH) at Leys Pools & Leisure Centre	April 2025	<b>Ongoing</b>	We are continuing to explore long term options with OUH, in particular with regards to their 0-19 services. Our experience is that these conversations take time (given the previous experience with Rose Hill and Barton Community Centres). In addition, we have been weaving in the new build Blackbird Leys Community Centre conversation. Designs have now been finalised ready for planning, but we will continue to also explore space options within the centre. Discussions at the Leys Leisure Centre have been positive and Partners from the Trust have been attending the Council's weekly co-working day and continue to show a committed interest in colocation and possibly some capital investment into the centre, these have not been finalised at this stage. Next Steps: Meeting with Active Lifestyles Commissioning Group in October and Leys Youth Hub. Works start in September (which help define

CO-DESIGN SHARED OUTCOMES			October 2024 & final update
			spaces available within the site). We are also seeking to pin down Health requirements for any spaces and any funding availability.
Deliver smoking cessation pilot with Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust at Barton Leisure Centre.		<b>Complete</b>	<p>The Council collaborate with OUH NHS Trust's Here for Health Team on initiatives like Move Together and You Move referrals, attend healthy hospital events, and contribute to the Chartered Institute for the Management of Sport and Physical Activity Health subgroup.</p> <p>Ice Creates, commissioned by Oxfordshire County Council, delivers NHS health checks and smoking cessation services, hosting these at the Council's community and leisure centres, and supporting Oxford City Council's staff wellbeing weeks and Health Promotion events.</p>
Engage with One Public Estate (OPE) team at County to identify further opportunities		<b>Complete</b>	Engagement was completed and is on-going. Potential opportunities have been identified and the Council is working with OPE on securing feasibility funding.
Expand the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) to include all District Councils and key non-Oxford based institutions to better align work to deliver zero carbon objectives at city and countywide levels		<b>Complete</b>	The ZCOP Steering Group has approved its expansion to include all Oxfordshire local authorities and non-Oxford based institutions. The Oxfordshire Chief Executives group have endorsed this and work to implement the expansion is now underway

## Recommendation 2: Prioritisation

- Match the Council's ambitious plans to the resources required for their delivery. Be deliberate about adding and removing projects when something new is added.
- Strategically sequence the council's projects. Look to upskill and agilely move around staff to resource priorities.

PRIORITISATION			October 2024 & final update
Support stronger prioritisation through review of Corporate Strategy 2024/2028, focusing on things which have biggest impact on delivering against priorities		<b>Complete</b>	A slimmer Corporate Strategy has now been approved by Council for 2024/2028 than the previous 2020/2024 document. It focuses on the key outcomes the Council wishes to achieve.
Ensure new commitments in Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) 2024/25 include full assessment of capacity and resources required to deliver		<b>Complete</b>	New commitments are carefully managed within the narrowing funding envelope of the 2024/28 MTFP, achieving a balanced budget over the four-year period. There is now a commitment to further detailed reviews to achieve targeted cost savings in Communities and ODS from 2025/26 onwards.
Take a more robust approach to stopping or re-profiling projects where capacity needs to be re-prioritised and communicate clearly with members when this needs to happen		<b>Complete</b>	The more robust approach to stopping/re-profiling projects is now embedded. The Cave Street project has stopped. The Town Hall Phase 2 project paused pending additional resources. An ICT project prioritisation plan was agreed with the Corporate Management Team and Heads of Service.
Corporate PMO to provide flexible resource to support projects		<b>Complete</b>	Funding is included in the agreed Council's 2024/25 Budget.
Assessment of roles across organisation with transferable skills that could be used more flexibly	March 2025	<b>Ongoing</b>	Work has commenced with the creation of an Action Plan responding to the 2024 Employee Engagement Survey including a number of measures to boost personal and career development. Phase 2 in 2025-26 will focus on increasing flexibility around recruitment linking this with opportunity to build skills internally through training/apprenticeships.
A focused Fit for the Future team post March 2024 will ensure priority change programmes continue		<b>Complete</b>	A permanent team has now been appointed.

### Recommendation 3: Corporate Centre/ Programme management office

- Ensure there is corporate control on the many projects the Council is progressing.
- Consider making permanent the current PMO structure and invest in the Council’s project management specialists.
- Look to upskill and equip staff with the necessary training for performance and project management.
- A team based within the corporate centre of the organisation should oversee the Council’s multiple projects including the Fit for the Future change projects, savings programme, capital programme and the IT improvements. This will help the council in maintaining a corporate grip on project progress and see developments in the round.

CORPORATE CENTRE / PROJECT MANAGEMENT			October 2024 & final update
The well-established Capital PMO, supporting Development Board, will continue, working with the corporate PMO through a matrixed arrangement		<b>Complete</b>	Corporate PMO has been established and is working well with the existing capital PMO.
Budget for a small corporate PMO is within the current Medium Term Financial Plan (MTFP) process		<b>Complete</b>	Budget is within the current MTFP.
Project management skills development will be launched		<b>Complete</b>	Basic Project Management skills training is now available for all colleagues, led by PMO staff. More targeted training will be offered in the autumn.

## Recommendation 4: Performance management

- The Council should refresh its performance management framework in line with the new *Council Strategy*. This framework should be linked to outcomes.
- The Council should look to use data more intelligently to improve service quality. A consistent performance and data-driven culture needs to be embedded.

PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT			October 2024 & final update
Preferred Corporate KPIs selected for reporting against 2024/28 Corporate Strategy		<b>Complete</b>	A full suite of Corporate KPIs and targets for 2024/28 was agreed by Cabinet in September.
Preferred Operational KPIs selected for reporting against to support service delivery	December 2024	<b>Ongoing</b>	A more focused set of operational KPIs and monitoring framework is being developed for delivery across the Council.
Create performance dashboard and automate using Power BI.	December 2024	<b>Ongoing</b>	New reporting dashboards are being commissioned to enable effective monitoring of KPIs.
BIU to review use of tools such as Local Government Association Inform across council and raise awareness of data available		<b>Complete</b>	LG Inform is being used alongside new metrics provided by OFLOG and the Housing & Local Government Ombudsman to guide the Council's use of data around its operations.
Upweight inclusive economy campaign to better communicate regen and development work across the city and how it is benefiting the city and residents		<b>Complete</b>	A dedicated Communications Officer has been appointed to support Inclusive Economy campaigns and a new upweighted campaign programme is being implemented for the 2024/25 Council year.



## Recommendation 5: Leveraging and communicating the regeneration

- The Council should continue and go further with its inclusive economy campaign. Seeking to inform and demonstrate how the exciting regeneration projects can benefit all local residents.


LEVERAGING AND COMMUNICATING THE REGENERATION			October 2024 & final update
Link to work underway to develop a “Place Narrative” for Oxfordshire, communicating the local benefits of regeneration and development		<b>Complete</b>	The Place narrative is now complete and will be used to support future communications and narrative on regeneration projects.
Focus on how we engage our communities in our work on regeneration – to help shape what we are trying to achieve, and get partners / anchor institutions on board with the narrative  41	March 2025	<b>Ongoing</b>	The role of localities managers in regeneration and capital projects are currently under review as part of the broader community services evaluation. This needs to be integrated into the council’s overall priorities and localities work review. This process is ongoing.  In the meantime, Locality Managers and Regeneration Managers continue to work together on major schemes e.g. the former Odeon and BBL Regeneration to engage with community groups and help shape proposals
Establish a partnership group of developers and landowners to look to co-ordinate and produce a framework for working on Community Employment Planning		<b>Complete</b>	A Skills Working Group as part of the Oxford Economic Steering Board has been set up which will focus on City Skills. It will be led by Activate Learning and will engage a coalition of the willing developers and others to work to develop this framework. The City Council has put £10,000 of the UKSPF allocation to support this groups work in progressing. The target for initial outcomes will be end of March 2025 but the work will be ongoing beyond that as it will build over time as more of the developers come on board and Community Employment Plans increase.

## Recommendation 6: Organisational structure

- When looking at the organisational structure the Council should have an outcome-focused mindset, using its data to drive policy and performance.
- The Council should use its resources flexibly to allow for agility in serving the delivery of projects.
- Recruitment, retention and progression should be at the forefront when considering an organisational structure.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE			October 2024 & final update
There is a further £1 million saving within the Medium-Term Financial Plan on management costs. Proposals for the next stage will be brought forwards early 2024 and clearly align structure to outcomes in a sustainable manner.	March 2025	Ongoing	£400k of the £1.4million target has been delivered. Options relating to a senior level restructure are being published in the autumn.
Future iterations of our change capacity to continue to utilise internal resource creatively. Internal progression opportunities are a priority within the People Strategy		Complete	Fit for The Future will continue to utilise internal resource.

## Recommendation 7: Hybrid working / IT infrastructure

- The Council's IT systems need to be improved; this is particularly important now most staff are remotely based.
-  The Council should look to put on more in-person events and team meetings, providing reasons for staff to come into the office.
- The team principles for hybrid working are important and should be refreshed and emphasised regularly.

HYBRID WORKING/ IT INFRASTRUCTURE			October 2024 & Final Update
Capital budget bids to support improvements to ways of working and our systems are included within this budget round. Provision for improved Wi-Fi connectivity within the Town Hall is funded		Complete	The Capital Budget and Medium-Term Financial Plan include the necessary allocations to support the Technology and ICT programmes. The Town Hall Wi-Fi project is fully funded.
Phase 2 of the Town Hall – set out the long-term vision of the Town Hall facilities and use	December 2025	Ongoing	New Project Manager has now started. Project Implementation Document now being drafted and internal bid for feasibility funds being developed.
OneDrive and SharePoint implementation	March 2025	Ongoing	Onedrive implementation has been completed. A specialist consultant report is awaited regarding the Sharepoint implementation, which will likely be early autumn.
Team priorities quarterly reviews will be encouraged		Complete	Regular communications go out on Team Principles and a Leadership Conversation on Smarter Working included a session on this.

HYBRID WORKING/ IT INFRASTRUCTURE		October 2024 & Final Update	
Improved capacity, resilience and development of our ICT support team		<b>Complete</b>	Recruitment to key positions has been positive, with a number of internal promotions and staff moving to permanent contracts. An improvement plan for the service desk has been implemented. The prioritised project plan and Front Door of Change are managing demand, and an ICT Board has been established to coordinate delivery.
Set expectations for in person team meetings for all teams		<b>Complete</b>	Updated guidance has been provided to managers and staff encouraging a regular cycle of in person team meetings and rolling programme to refresh all teams' Team Principles which set out their working preferences. Large teams given priority booking arrangements for large Town Hall rooms.
Internal communications campaign to promote in person collaboration and ways to bring people together  43		<b>Complete</b>	A Leadership conversation (a forum of c100 council managers) was delivered on flexible working. Staff were encouraged to look at ways of working together. Six managers shared what works for their teams to create opportunities for informal interaction and bring people together to build relationships. 70 managers took part in breakout rooms, sharing and discussing their ideas. Open Door (regular updates with members of the executive team open to all staff) attendances average around 35 and attendance is growing. Let's Talk (all staff informal briefings) attendance is always over 100. A full staff conference staff is planned over two days in April 2024 bringing together c650 people face to face, promoting collaborative working across all service areas.
Encourage more visibility in the office of Corporate Management Team (CMT) and heads of Service		<b>Complete</b>	Monthly in-person and locality visits by the Corporate Management Team (CMT) are now a standard practice. Additionally, CMT has introduced 'Open Door' sessions to encourage more direct communication. Pilot 'back to the frontline' initiatives are also being sought.

## Recommendation 8: Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet

- Forward plan meetings between the CMT and Cabinet to co-design policy and keep all Cabinet members informed of projects across the Council.

October 2024 & final update		
Reinstate regular and structured Corporate Management Team and Cabinet briefing meetings	<b>Complete</b>	This has been done with meetings taking place monthly. The Corporate Management Team also attend the weekly leaders meeting and the full cabinet leader briefing.
Implement one Leader's Meeting a month as an invite for full Cabinet	<b>Complete</b>	This is in place and diarised each month.

## Recommendation 9: Member development

- In preparing for the May 2024 member induction process, the Council needs to strengthen its training provision for new and existing members.
- Training should also be developed for new and existing Cabinet members.
- An annual Cabinet development day should be considered. In strengthening the member development programme, the Council is building capacity and expertise for the future.

MEMBER DEVELOPMENT		October 2024 & final update	
Undertake an audit/ canvas of what training members want/ need	December 2024	<b>Ongoing</b>	Owing to the general election some of the induction sessions are still outstanding. The full audit will be conducted once the training sessions have completed post summer though feedback is continually being sought and provided by members as they attend the sessions. In addition where there are key topics for the Council the team are promoting LGA sessions to members.
Actively promote training and development opportunities to Members (Local Government Association resources and training) via weekly update		<b>Complete</b>	LGA training courses and other training opportunities for councillors are routinely communicated to all Members in the weekly update.
Review and redevelopment of the member induction training programme		<b>Complete</b>	The Member induction programme, is ongoing due to the general election causing delay, and is proving very successful. A market stall event for Members was very well received by staff and members alike and we are exploring how we can do further targeted events throughout the municipal year.



## Recommendation 10: The Oxford Model

- As with any model of delivery, it is important the Council regularly and systematically assures itself it is getting value for money, quality of service and achievement of its intended outcomes. The Council should look to benchmark itself with other councils with wholly owned companies and consider an independent review to gain assurance on value for money and service quality.
- Ensure there is an alignment between the *Council Strategy* and the business plans of the wholly owned companies.
- The Council should strengthen its client arrangements. This would then act as a mechanism to prevent the escalation of operational matters to the shareholder.
- The Council should deliver communications and dedicated training for all on the reasons for and the intended benefits of the Oxford Model. This will strengthen the organisation's understanding of the approach the council has taken.

THE OXFORD MODEL			October 2024 & final update
Recruit to permanent strategic commissioning and clienting role	December 2024	Ongoing	Following an interim placement, we are in the process of recruiting a permanent Commissioning and Clienting Manager. The postholder will develop and oversee OCC's C&C arrangements with ODS; support OCC's service leads to successfully client and deliver commissions; and foster effective working between the OCC and ODS.
Develop and publish an agreed definition of the Oxford Model, identifying shared values and purpose	September 2024	Ongoing	An updated definition of the Oxford Model is being finalised for publication on the Council's website.
Undertake review of commissioning and clienting arrangements and develop strategic framework for commissioning		Complete	OCC's commissioning and clienting arrangements for ODS have been reviewed across GF and HRA services. New arrangements have been developed and will be introduced for the HRA as part of new 5-year investment plans; and for GF services in the April 2025 alongside the completion of the ODS commissioned services review.
Clarify role, responsibilities of Oxford City Council clients as part of appraisal objectives		Complete	Oxford City Council clients have now been identified for all ODS LATCo services.
Review company governance against recently published LATCo guidance to ensure best practice is embedded		Complete	The review has been undertaken. Scrutiny has been reviewed and we are pending the first few meetings of the new arrangements to see how they are working in practice. Advance oversight of the decisions coming from the companies has improved and is has meant the existing collaboration with OCC Officers has improved further.

THE OXFORD MODEL			October 2024 & final update
			The next stage is around the review of the key documentation. The new chair of the ODS board commences this month so it will be discussed with her in regard to timelines and actions.
Work with ODS and OX Place on development of model to respond to changes in council funding streams	December 2024	Ongoing	ODS Clienting and Budget reviews continue and are interdependent. There is line of sight as to the 2025/2026 ODS budget savings. A work programme is being established to work through longer-term clienting and commissioning objectives. HRA Business Plan review is also progressing.
Ensure a single budget setting timetable is understood by all parties		Complete	The timetable was communicated to all Heads of Service and Corporate Management Team. The plan was generally achieved on time resulting in a Consultation Budget published in December and the final budget in February.

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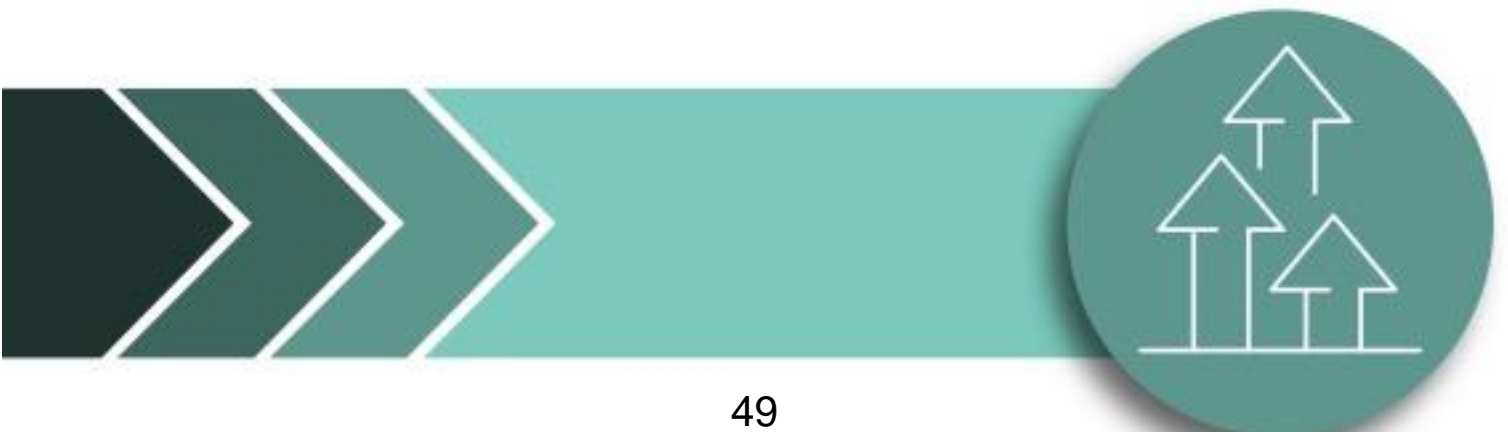


# LGA Corporate Peer Challenge – Progress Review

Oxford City Council

Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024

Feedback





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# 1. Introduction

The council undertook an LGA Corporate Peer Challenge (CPC) during July 2023 and promptly published the [full report](#) with an [action plan](#).

The Progress Review is an integral part of the CPC process. Taking place approximately ten months after the CPC, it is designed to provide space for the council's senior leadership to:

- Update peers on the early progress made and to receive feedback on this including how the action plan aligns to the CPC's recommendations
- Consider peers' reflections on any new opportunities or challenges that may have arisen since the peer team were 'on-site' including any further support needs
- Discuss any early impact or learning from the progress made to date

The LGA would like to thank Oxford City Council for their commitment to sector led improvement. This Progress Review was the next step in an ongoing, open and close relationship that the council has with LGA sector support.

# 2. Summary of the approach

The Progress Review at Oxford City Council took place on Tuesday 9<sup>th</sup> April 2024.

The Progress Review focussed on each of the recommendations from the Corporate Peer Challenge, under the following theme headings:

- **Local priorities and outcomes**
  - Recommendation 1 – Co-design shared outcomes
  - Recommendation 2 - Prioritisation
- **Project and programme management**
  - Recommendation 3 - Corporate centre / Programme management office
  - Recommendation 4 – Performance management
- **Place leadership**
  - Recommendation 5 - Communicating the regeneration
- **Organisation leadership**

- Recommendation 6 – Organisational structure
- Recommendation 8 - Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet
- **Governance and culture**
  - Recommendation 9 - Member development
- **Financial planning and management**
  - Recommendation 10 – The Oxford Model
- **Capacity for improvement**
  - Recommendation 7 – Hybrid working / IT infrastructure

For this Progress Review, the following members of the original CPC team were involved:

- Mark Davies, Chief Executive, Lancaster City Council
- Alan Waters, Former Leader, Norwich City Council
- Tracie Langley, Chief Operating Officer and s.151 Officer, Cornwall Council
- Harry Parker, Peer Challenge Manager, Local Government Association

### 3. Progress Review - Feedback

Following Oxford City Council's CPC in July 2023, the council promptly published the report and developed an action plan in response to the peer review. Internal mechanisms were established to monitor progress of delivering the action plan, with periodic updates taken to Cabinet and the Corporate Management Team (CMT). It was clear to the peer team that the council have positively engaged in the CPC process; taken onboard the peer review findings and have been thoughtful about the impact of the recommendations.

Since the CPC there has been considerable change at Oxford City Council. The council has moved to no overall control, following the resignation of 10 members from the ruling Labour Group, with these members now sitting as Independent councillors. Despite the move to no overall control, the Labour Group has formed a minority administration and continued its programme of activity.

Work has continued throughout the year, progressing the authority's priority areas, such as around addressing Oxford's housing supply shortage. The peer team heard

about the ongoing work to deliver 1,600 new social and affordable homes through the council's company OX Place and in partnership with other housing associations.

The peer team felt that the council should be commended for piloting a Regulator for Social Housing (RSH) inspection. In doing so the council demonstrated proactive leadership within the sector and a dedication to enhancing standards as a corporate landlord. The exercise has formed a critical part of shaping the transformation of the council's landlord services and the council is in the process of implementing significant changes to service delivery and governance to ensure full compliance with the new standards for social housing. A comprehensive action plan is in development, which will need to be monitored carefully and have open communication with tenants about the changes which are going to be delivered.

For a district council Oxford's housing stock of more than 8,000 is quite large. The council commissioned a review of its plan for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA). Similar to many other councils Oxford's HRA is under considerable pressure with the demand for new social housing very high alongside the need for estate improvements in areas such as retrofit, particularly acute if the council is to achieve its stated ambition of all of the council housing stock to be energy performance certificate (EPC) rated C as a minimum by 2030.

As the commissioned review stated - given the pressure on the HRA - delivering further retrofit and meeting decency standards alongside the purchasing of new social housing units through OX Place and other developers beyond the existing planned programme would be unaffordable in future years. This therefore means a process of prioritising HRA expenditure will be needed. This also may have implications for the current business and funding model of OX Place. It is welcomed that a review has been commissioned into the future funding and delivery model of OX Place with a report due shortly. A variety of considerations should be looked at including approaches other authorities have adopted such as establishing housing companies as a registered provider.

Action planning is underway in response to the RSH pilot and the HRA reviews that have been conducted. These should be taken through the appropriate formal governance structures within the council, ensuring member oversight and ownership.

In the last year the council has experienced a rapid increase in demand for

temporary accommodation. The approximate average in the past year of households presenting as homeless was 220, which is up from an average of 100 in the previous year. This trend is forecast to continue with the number of households in temporary accommodation in July 2024 projected to be 315. This significant increase has meant that the council has had to move swiftly to introduce mitigations such as the purchasing and leasing of additional temporary accommodation, an increased use of hotels and a reallocation of some of the council's existing stock as temporary housing.

These actions have been partly successful in reducing the cost burden. During the 2023/24 financial year, if the actions were not taken an additional £2m cost would have been borne. Despite the measures undertaken, the council continues to forecast a £3m annual pressure on temporary accommodation alone. Without additional support and/or legislative change this could quickly develop into an unsustainable challenge with this pressure alone equivalent to 12.5 per cent of the council's annual net budget.

The council is well aware of the pressure it faces regarding temporary accommodation and homelessness and has articulated this challenge strongly in its lobbying efforts of central government.

As mentioned during the CPC, Oxford City Council is a particularly ambitious district council, one which is performing well. The council's successes have been recognised externally, with its shortlisting for four of the *2024 Local Government Chronicle Awards* including for *Council of the Year*.

**Local priorities and outcomes**

No.	Recommendation – Co-design shared outcomes
1	Convene the city's anchor institutions to work together in developing shared outcomes and collectively drive how these are delivered and procured.

The council have taken some positive steps, along with partners, to communicate collective visions for the city. A good example of this was in January 2024 the [Oxford West End website](#) was launched which seeks to communicate and update residents on the regeneration in the west end part of the city centre.

Following discussions with Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH) and Oxfordshire County Council, the Anchor Network was launched in February 2024 with an initial focus on procurement, employment and climate action. The peer team welcomed this development, with a commitment to progress shared priorities, utilising other public sector partners' expertise and resources. A particular area the Leader of the Council stressed to the peer team that she has been lobbying through this network is expanding the number of organisations paying the Oxford Living Wage. Since the CPC, steady progress has been made with more than 130 local employers participating in the scheme by paying the Oxford Living Wage.

Efforts have been taken to further collaboration between anchor institutions; the council is participating in a co-location pilot with OUH at the Leys Pool and Leisure Centre. This is a positive step in providing a rounded offer for residents in a public sector building. The peer team heard of further opportunities in the pipeline for co-locations, particularly in areas like the community hubs. A genuine success marker for the council would be if capital investment could be secured from key partners for similar shared purpose spaces.

There remains scope to go further, which the council acknowledges with the ambition described to the peer team to “*convene more; deliver less.*” Given the esteem Oxford City Council is held in by partners, the council is well positioned to push for this and should continue its efforts in this space.

No.	Recommendation – Prioritisation
2	Match the council’s ambitious plans to the resources required for their delivery. Be deliberate about adding and removing projects when something new is added. Strategically sequence the council’s projects. Look to upskill and agilely move around staff to resource priorities.

The council’s Corporate Strategy is up for renewal, during the Progress Review the peer team heard described to them positive examples of delivery under each priority area from the *Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024*. This is impressive, particularly in sustaining momentum despite the council moving to no overall control in October 2023.

A draft *Corporate Strategy 2024 – 2028* has been developed with the priority areas

remaining unchanged. The peer team heard of measures taken to ensure alignment to the *Oxford 2050 Vision* and the council's *Medium-term Financial Strategy* (MTFS). This draft strategy is scheduled to be taken to the July Cabinet and the July Council meeting. Whilst implementing a new Corporate Strategy promptly after the election would be helpful for plotting delivery in the coming years, the peer team would emphasise the importance of all members recognising and understanding the Corporate Strategy along with committing to its delivery. Consideration should be given to when the optimum time would be to take the new Corporate Strategy through the council's governance system. If there is a change of administration following the election, the peer team would encourage the council to delay bringing forward the new strategy.

The council has adopted a more robust approach towards halting or reprofiling projects when capacity requirements necessitate reprioritisation. The council provided several examples of projects which have been paused due to emerging issues being prioritised. These include the Cave Street redevelopment and phase two of the Town Hall project. The council have also introduced a dedicated prioritisation programme for all the council ICT projects due to resource constraints.

The peer team welcomed the prioritisation which has been undertaken, with the council appropriately pausing and sequencing projects aligned with the council's resources. It was explained to the peer team that there is an understanding of the need to deprioritise where necessary. Given the council's level of ambition it will need to remain conscious of capacity constraints to avoid the risk of overloading the organisation and not delivering priority areas to the desired standard. Prioritisation will remain an iterative process and due to ongoing constrained resources when emerging issues arise certain programmes or areas will need to be deprioritised.

**Project and programme management**

No.	Recommendation – Corporate centre / Programme management office
3	Ensure there is corporate control on the many projects the council is progressing. Consider making permanent the current PMO structure and invest in the council's project management specialists. Look to upskill and equip staff with the necessary training for performance and project management. A team based within the corporate centre of the organisation



	should oversee the council’s multiple projects including the fit for the future change projects, savings programme, capital programme and the IT improvements. This will help the council in maintaining a corporate grip on project progress and see developments in the round.
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The council has established a Project Management Office (PMO) to oversee the delivery of projects within the council’s capital programme. Senior officers assured the peer team that new capital projects are now subject to greater rigour with more time and resources spent on establishing the feasibility and outline business case before a bid is made through Cabinet and Council for budget approval of funds to carry out the project.

Feedback on the capital PMO was positive. Looking to build on these principles a small corporate PMO was built into the budget for 2024/25 and the MTFs which will oversee the council’s change programme, the planned for community services review and will lead on the development and rollout of project management training across the organisation in the summer of 2024.

As the peer team discussed with the council once the corporate PMO is established there will be scope for this team to develop beyond a dedicated project management remit. Once developed, and in line with sector best practice, the council can utilise these specialists to strategically manage the council’s risk framework. In doing so, providing greater assurance for the council that risks are appropriately monitored and mitigated.

No.	Recommendation – Performance management
4	The council should refresh its performance management framework in line with the new Council Strategy. This framework should be linked to outcomes. The council should look to use data more intelligently to improve service quality. A consistent performance and data-driven culture needs to be embedded.

In line with the development of the draft *Corporate Strategy 2024 – 2028* a suite of key performance indicators (KPI) have been developed; this follows a full review of the existing KPIs from the *Corporate Strategy 2020 – 2024*. The council takes

quarterly integrated performance reports to Cabinet covering the financial, corporate performance and corporate risk positions of the council. The peer team heard described to them a commitment to effectively manage corporate performance, utilising information and data which is available. Positively, the council has commissioned a Power BI dashboard drawing on over 30 data sets with the objective of simplifying data sets for easier read across to drive decision making. This development is being overseen by the business intelligence unit. Whilst this team can develop a variety of helpful tools and widgets, to make a material difference this performance information needs to be owned and used corporately by the CMT and senior members. The peer team heard that more is still to be done for the council's performance information to be routinely used as a strategic driver of policy development.

**Place leadership**

No.	Recommendation – Communicating the regeneration
5	The council should continue and go further with its inclusive economy campaign. Seeking to inform and demonstrate how the exciting regeneration projects can benefit all local residents.

The council explained to the peer team its efforts to upweight its inclusive economy campaigning to better communicate the regeneration and development work across the city. The council is currently reviewing the work programme of localities officers to support major development schemes, and regeneration objectives. These community-level based staff can play an important role in explaining the benefits of the regeneration and development for the city and residents.

During the Progress Review it was commented that since the CPC, the council has made a concerted effort to improve internal engagement on major planning pre-applications which are in the process of being brought forward. Monthly meetings with stakeholders from across the council have been established, this earlier engagement is positive and is a helpful step in breaking down siloes and helping inform wider conversations.

During the CPC, the peer team encouraged the council through the Future

Oxfordshire Partnership (FOP) to develop a place narrative for the city and county. The peer team heard that the cross-organisational work on this is ongoing with plans for a strategic economic plan, a new destination management plan and local skills improvement plan in development.

A positive regeneration story was shared with the peer team, with the council looking to undertake an inventive approach in utilising developer contributions to address skills shortages. The council is running a pilot, initially using UK Shared Prosperity funds, to establish processes to utilise developers’ Section 106 contributions from the West End development to fund skills training at the local further education college. In doing so demonstrating a holistic approach, using developer contributions to address skill shortages and provide residents funded training opportunities. The peer team felt this was an innovative approach and if successful could provide an example of best practice for the local government sector.

**Organisational leadership**

No.	Recommendation – Organisational structure
6	When looking at the organisational structure the council should have an outcome focused mindset, using its data to drive policy and performance. The council should use its resources flexibly to allow for agility in serving the delivery of projects. Recruitment, retention and progression should be at the forefront when considering an organisational structure.

Within the council’s MTFs there is a savings target of £1.4m for a reduction in management costs. To date £400k has been delivered and a senior management restructure is in development, with the objective of aligning the new structure to intended outcomes in a sustainable manner.

The council updated the peer team on the introduction of the aspiring managers leadership programme which has been brought in to look to develop and retain the talent within the organisation. Programmes like this reflect good practice, and the peer team would encourage the council to continue to invest in similar organisational development programmes. Other councils have introduced dedicated developing diverse leaders’ programmes, and this may be something the council wishes to

consider assisting the council in meeting its ongoing target of its workforce at all levels being representative of the communities it serves.

No.	Recommendation – Corporate Management Team (CMT) and Cabinet
8	Forward plan meetings between the CMT and Cabinet to co-design policy and keep all Cabinet members informed of projects across the council.

The council have organised monthly CMT and Cabinet briefing meetings, the feedback from these has been positive with working relationships cited as ‘being in a good place’. With these regular meetings being programmed, the peer team heard that the breadth of the Cabinet now has an improved visibility of work from across the council, helping them to identify interdependencies and foresee emerging issues and opportunities.

Following the council’s move to no overall control, regular briefings have been established for all group leaders. It is understood that this development has been widely welcomed. Whatever the outcome of the May election, the peer team encourage the council to continue with these regular meetings with the intention of fostering a greater understanding of current and upcoming projects and programmes.

### **Governance and culture**

Later in 2024, the council is planning on carrying out a governance and constitution review, including looking at the existing governance arrangements with the wholly owned companies. This sounds like a positive exercise, as does the work which was explained to the peer team that had been undertaken to audit current arrangements utilising [the Local Partnerships publication on local authority companies’ best practice](#) with governance improvements planned for post-election.

As was mentioned during the CPC, the council should continue to assist members and officers when they’re acting in a shareholder capacity. Dedicated training should be provided to support them in having an adequate understanding of each other’s roles and responsibilities ensuring Companies Act compliance. Effort should also be taken to explain the company models to the new members that are elected in May 2024.

No.	Recommendation – Member development
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9	In preparing for the May 2024 member induction process, the council needs to strengthen its training provision for new and existing members. Training should also be developed for new and existing Cabinet members. An annual Cabinet development day should be considered. In strengthening the member development programme, the council is building capacity and expertise for the future.
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To inform a strengthened member development programme feedback was sought on the existing process, with a fuller audit of support and dedicated canvassing of training requests planned for post-election. The peer team were updated by the council on improvements made to member training since the CPC, these include standard items on the weekly members' briefing email promoting training and [development programmes provided by the LGA](#) and the [Local Government Information Unit](#) (LGIU).

In planning for May 2024 election and the subsequent member induction programme, a member prospectus has been developed which includes both a mandatory and optional training plan. A market stall event for members to meet with officers from across the council is planned. Key service areas such as housing, finance and communities will be present as will representatives from the council's companies, OX Place and Oxford Direct Services (ODS).

Member training provision by its nature should be an iterative process. At present ownership for this training sits under the Standards Committee; the peer team feel the council should consider establishing a dedicated member working group on training and development to provide greater focus to oversee and influence the offer.

The council has commissioned and is due to roll out post-election a new member casework system. The development of a new system has been sought after by members and provides an opportunity for the organisation to reset and establish an improved process for responding to member enquiries. It will be important when implementing this new system sufficient training is provided for both members and officers. Specific training for officers focused on providing good quality responses to appropriate requests may be something the council wishes to consider.

## Financial planning and management

Oxford City Council continues to have a good record of financial management and managing its budget. At quarter three for 2023/24 the council was reporting a relatively healthy position on the in-year £27.8m revenue budget, with a small overspend forecast of £474k after the planned use of general fund reserves (£1.3m). This position does not include the expected dividend payment of £4m from ODS.

The council did well to set its budget for 2024/25 and a balanced four-year MTFS. To do this as a minority administration is impressive, with the Liberal Democrats group supporting the adoption of this budget. This speaks to the healthy cross-party working in the council.

The four-year MTFS was set with a significant (£7m) contribution from reserves. During discussions as part of the Progress Review it was clear to the peer team the council is using these reserves in a prudent manner, with a well evidenced plan behind their use. Similarly, to many councils, reserves are being needed to be spent to deliver balanced budgets, this will though need to be closely monitored as it is not a sustainable strategy to routinely draw down on depleting funds.

No.	Recommendation – The Oxford Model
10	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• As with any model of delivery it is important the council regularly and systematically assures itself it is getting value for money, quality of service and achievement of its intended outcomes. The council should look to benchmark itself with other councils with wholly owned companies and consider an independent review to gain assurance on value for money and service quality.</li> <li>• Ensure there is an alignment between the Council Strategy and the business plans of the wholly owned companies.</li> <li>• The council should strengthen its client arrangements. This would then act as a mechanism to prevent the escalation of operational matters to the shareholder.</li> <li>• The council should deliver communications and dedicated training for all staff on the reasons for and the intended benefits of the Oxford Model. This will strengthen the organisation’s understanding of the approach the council has taken.</li> </ul>

The council has responded to the recommendation to strengthen its clienting arrangements. A review was carried out on the existing commissioning and clienting arrangements which was due to report at the end of March 2024. To enhance capabilities for commissioning and client management the council has created a dedicated manager post. This post-holder will lead on the development and implementation of strengthened arrangements, providing improved contract grip for the council as well as a focus on developing productive relationships with contractors and suppliers.

At the January Cabinet the letting of a new long-term leisure contract was approved. This was a significant decision for the council and poses an opportunity for an improved leisure offering for residents. It is hoped the strengthened contract management processes the council are putting in place will enable this relationship with a new contractor to start productively and help to ensure performance is effectively managed.

The council has committed to undertaking two comprehensive reviews: on community services and on Oxford Direct Services (ODS). These reviews are important, and it appears a measured and sensible approach to undertake them. The financial imperative behind both reviews is well understood. The community services review is looking to deliver £800k savings and the ODS review £600k savings both by the end of 2025/26. It is positive the council have brought in an experienced director-level officer to oversee both reviews. It is important there is alignment and read across from both reviews and that they are delivered in a timely manner.

The need to deliver a significant level of savings is a clear motivator behind the reviews, as is the acknowledgement that the conditions and operating environment from when the company was set up is now very different, with expectations and requirements evolving. This company review is a helpful vehicle to pick these up.

Whilst it is crucial ODS retains its commercial independence – the council through its contract and performance management frameworks – can require demonstration from the company that it is achieving the necessary value for money and productivity outputs – whilst maintaining alignment with the council's priorities.



When speaking to the peer team there was an acknowledgement and a pride that Oxford City Council provides a lot of services other district councils do not. Given the level of ambition the council has, it has often stepped into the space of directly delivering, sometimes in areas which are not exclusively a district council's responsibility. A range of discretionary services and community grants are still awarded which will need to be reviewed as to whether they are both affordable and are significantly contributing to the delivery of the council's priorities.

**Capacity for improvement**

No.	Recommendation – Hybrid working / IT infrastructure
7	The council's IT systems need to be improved; this is particularly important now most staff are remotely based. The council should look to put on more in-person events and team meetings, providing reasons for staff to come into the office. The team principles for hybrid working are important and should be refreshed and emphasised regularly

Following strategic decisions taken regarding the council's estate footprint, Oxford City Council has embraced remote working for staff. Most staff are remotely based, with a hybrid working option available at the Town Hall. This narrative around remote working appears to be well understood by staff and members and is aligned to the council's asset and IT strategy. The peer team heard during the Progress Review some of the benefits for the council of embracing default remote working, with positive examples provided regarding recruitment and retention.

Whilst remote working has become routine for officers, the council remains aware of the positives of in person events and meetings. Updated guidance has been provided to managers encouraging a regular cycle of in person team meetings as well as maintaining a rolling programme to refresh all teams' 'Team Principles' which set out their working preferences.

The council has a staff conference planned over two days in April 2024, bringing together c.650 staff face-to-face, updating staff on recent developments, planning for the May 2024 elections and generally promoting collaborative working across all service areas.



Since the CPC, the council has successfully implemented IT improvements such as stronger Wi-Fi connectivity and enhanced digital room capabilities within the Town Hall. The council's IT infrastructure is even more important given how remote focused the council are. Capital investment has been budgeted for to continue to make system improvements throughout the year.

## 4. Final thoughts and next steps

The LGA would like to thank Oxford City Council for undertaking an LGA CPC Progress Review.

We appreciate that senior managerial and political leadership will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions in order to determine how the organisation wishes to take things forward.

Under the umbrella of LGA sector-led improvement, there is an on-going offer of support to councils. The LGA is well placed to provide additional support, advice and guidance on a number of the areas identified for development and improvement and we would be happy to discuss this.

Will Brooks, Principal Adviser for the South East, is the main contact between the council and the Local Government Association. Will is available to discuss any further support the council requires – [william.brooks@local.gov.uk](mailto:william.brooks@local.gov.uk).

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