

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Monday 4 November 2024

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Committee members present:

Councillor Miles (Chair)	Councillor Corais (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Hunt (<i>substitute for Cllr Qayyum</i>)	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Ottino
Councillor Henwood (<i>substitute for Cllr Stares</i>)	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Uswah Khan, Committee and Member Services Officer
James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager
Helen Horne, Managing Director (OX Place)
Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager
Alison Salter, Head of Development (OX Place)
Dave Scholes, Affordable Housing Supply Corporate Lead
Jeremy Vickers, Interim Finance Director (OX Place)
David Watt, Strategic Finance Manager (OX Place)
Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy

Also present:

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford
Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford
Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Latif, Qayyum and Stares sent apologies.
Substitutes are shown above.

38. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

39. Chair's Announcements

The Chair announced that Cllr Malik had resigned from the Committee, and that a new Committee member would be appointed at the Council meeting in November.

40. Minutes

The Committee resolved to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 8 October 2024 as a true and accurate record.

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

41. Update on the development of Oxford River Charter

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy introduced the report providing an update on the Council's engagement with Thames Water, noting two consecutive years of poor water quality and the Environment Agency's ongoing work to investigate pollution sources in detail. It was noted that the proposed Oxford River Action Plan would be informed by the EA's findings, with action pending to address water quality concerns.

Cllr Corais joined the meeting.

Cllr Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford was also in attendance to answer questions.

Cllr Ottino queried clarity of responsibilities between the Council and the Environment Agency, particularly regarding maintenance gaps. The Head of Corporate Strategy clarified that some flowing water bodies like brooks fall under the Council's responsibility rather than Thames Water's, though the laws on repair and ownership are somewhat unclear. He added that, while the ODS maintained gutters and roadsides on behalf of the County Council to mitigate fluvial flooding risks, options were limited during heavy rainfall.

Cllr Jarvis highlighted the value of regular meetings with Thames Water in addressing concerns. The Head of Corporate Strategy agreed, noting that current discussions focused on treatment works and recent executive changes at Thames Water, with improved engagement from government and EA officials. He mentioned that while broader member involvement had not been part of these talks, this could be considered in the future.

Cllr Henwood raised concerns about road runoff water, specifically mentioning Heyford Lane and asked if future mitigation was possible. It was clarified that this responsibility likely fell to the Highways Authority rather than the City Council.

Cllr Miles questioned the Council's role in addressing domestic misconnections contributing to river pollution, particularly within Council-owned and housing association properties. The Head of Corporate Strategy responded that he was not aware of any Council enforcement responsibility. Cllr Miles suggested using Council influence to convene stakeholders on these impacts.

Cllr Henwood further queried the path of storm runoff from roads. The Head of Corporate Strategy noted that runoff was directed to various points, with some discharging into watercourses. Cllr Railton added that identifying pollutant sources in watercourses was an evolving but unresolved issue.

Cllr Miles asked about research or actions that could address domestic misconnections, seeking clarity on current or potential measures. Cllr Ottino questioned whether landlords would be liable for costs or if the Council would bear them.

Cllr Hunt raised the need for enhanced river water testing to support future Council action plans. Cllr Railton cautioned that while the Council may request testing, results were not guaranteed. It was explained that the Environment Agency, as required by DEFRA, was conducting a detailed study to identify pollutant sources, and once available, this data would guide the Council's water quality efforts.

Cllr Mundy expressed concern about Thames Water's financial stability and suggested the need for a contingency plan if the company ceases operations. It was assured that DEFRA and OFWAT have protocols in place to maintain operations in such a scenario.

The Committee noted the importance of planning for stormwater runoff and flash floods in the context of the climate emergency.

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

1. That the Council formally requests a structured meeting with Thames Water, for Council Members to put forward resident concerns about water issues in the city, and for officers to provide support in proposing the structuring of the meeting.
2. That Officers develop a proposal for council to convene multi-stakeholder dialogue event between Members, local Members of Parliament, industry and other water quality stakeholders to inform the content of a future Oxford City River Action Plan, to identify coordinated efforts to safeguard Oxford's water resources for the future.
3. That the Council commissions a review by Officers to clarify its powers, obligations and the potential actions based on good practice to: identify and enforce existing domestic misconnections in residential properties that the council has control or influence over; and to prevent future misconnections, in order to safeguard against water contamination.

Cllr Railton and Mish Tullar left the meeting and did not return.

42. Leisure Update

Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford, and Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, introduced the report, highlighting the Council's effective management of its contracts and the success of this particular partnership. He mentioned that the Council had been working closely with More Leisure to achieve positive outcomes that met the Council's goals and expectations. This partnership also provided valuable lessons to inform future improvements in contract management.

James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager, and Nigel Kennedy, Head of Finance Services, were also present to answer questions.

Cllr Ottino queried the improvements made to leisure centres since the supplier change. The Active Communities Manager explained that an improvement roadmap was in place, addressing legacy issues from the previous supplier that would take time to resolve. The Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager added that an upgrade programme was planned over the next 18 months, focusing on ventilation

improvements and retrofitting the changing rooms. He also highlighted ongoing efforts to strengthen recruitment, including filling the Active Communities position.

Cllr Hunt commented positively on the size of the Barton gym but raised concerns about the condition of some facilities under the new provider, particularly the state of the changing rooms. She suggested focusing on securing year-round use of the lido by utilising the existing water heat pump to warm the outdoor pool. The Active Communities Manager acknowledged ongoing discussions regarding the lido's business case and funding, noting that the Council was consulting with providers across the country to learn from other lido projects.

Cllr Hunt also highlighted the need for improved ventilation in all sports facilities and pools, especially in light of COVID-related concerns over air quality. Cllr Munkonge concluded by noting that More Leisure had gone above and beyond in their efforts to support these facility improvements.

The Committee acknowledged and welcomed the new practice of a dedicated officer responsible for overseeing facility conditions and ensuring issues are picked up on a more timely manner.

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

1. That the Council requests Officers to explore a business case for the availability and year-round access to the lido, utilising the existing water source heat pump to support sustainable operations.
2. That the Council ensures enhanced ventilation is included in any retrofitting or renovations of the leisure centre changing facilities, with a specific focus on health and safety.
3. That the Council establishes a process for a six-monthly review of the leisure supplier's finances, with update reports provided to the Finance and Performance Panel for ongoing review and oversight.

43. Matters exempt or part exempt from publication and exclusion of the public

The Committee resolved that under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 the press and public be excluded from the meeting during consideration of Appendix 1 to the 'Leisure Update' report, and the 'OX Place - OCH(I)L Recovery Plan' on the grounds that their presence would involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act.

a) Leisure Updated - exempt appendix

The Committee asked questions in relation to the information contained in Appendix 1 to the report.

Cllr Munkonge, Hagan Lewisman, James Baughan and Nigel Kennedy left the meeting and did not return.

b) OX Place - OCH(I)L Recovery Plan

The Committee discussed matters relating to information contained in the exempt report.

Cllr Chapman, Helen Horne, David Watt, Alison Salter, Jeremy Vickers, and Dave Scholes left the meeting and did not return.

44. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee agreed the Work Plan.

45. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Committee noted that on 16 October 2024, Cabinet considered recommendations related to 2 reports, responses to which had been included in the agenda pack:

- Annual Air Quality Status Report
- ZCOP Partnership Expansion

The Committee also noted that the Housing and Homelessness Panel met on 10 October to discuss two reports from the Head of Housing Services: *Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update* and the *Housing Complaint Handling Annual Report 2023/24*. The Panel had wide ranging discussions however no formal recommendations were made.

46. Dates of future meetings

The Committee was informed that an extraordinary meeting had been scheduled for 18 November 2024. In addition, it was noted that the meeting scheduled for 1 April 2025 would be rescheduled to 26 March 2025 in observance of the Festival of Eid.

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6:00 pm and ended at 8:15 pm

Chair

Date: Monday 18 November 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.