

Agenda

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Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

MOVED from 15 January

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Tuesday 21 January 2025**

Time: **6.00 pm**

Place: **Zoom - Remote meeting**

For further information please contact:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, Committee Services Officer

📞 07483 010160

✉ DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk

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

- may register in advance to speak to the committee in accordance with the [committee's rules](#)
- may record all or part of the meeting in accordance with the Council's [protocol](#)

Information about speaking and recording is set out in the agenda and on the [website](#)

Please contact the Committee Services Officer to register to speak; to discuss recording the meeting; or with any other queries.

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All public papers are available from the calendar link to this meeting once published

Committee Membership

Councillors: Membership 4: Quorum 2: substitutes are permitted.

Councillor James Fry (Chair)

Councillor Chris Jarvis

Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton

Councillor Ian Yeatman

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

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1 Apologies	
2 Declarations of Interest	
3 Chair's Announcements	
4 Notes of the previous meeting	7 - 12
<p>The Panel is asked to agree the notes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 as a true and accurate record.</p>	
5 Finance and Performance Panel Work Plan	13 - 14
<p>The Panel is asked to consider the Work Plan and agree any amendments.</p>	
6 Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025-2026	
<p>Cabinet, at its meeting on 5 February 2025, will consider a report from the Head of Financial Services seeking approval for changes to the Council's Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2025/2026. Cllr Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services and Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager have been invited to present the report and answer questions. The Panel is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.</p> <p>The report will be published as part of a supplementary agenda.</p>	
7 Dates of future meetings	
<p>The Panel is asked to note the dates and times of future meetings of the Finance and Performance Panel:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• 07 April 2025, 6pm <p><i>Meetings will take place remotely via Zoom.</i></p>	
8 Matters Exempt or part exempt from publication and	

exclusion of the public

If the Panel wishes to exclude the press and the public from the meeting during consideration of any aspects of the preceding or following agenda items it will be necessary for the Panel to pass a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972 specifying the grounds on which their presence could involve the likely disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Act if and so long, as in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

(The Access to Information Procedure Rules – Section 15 of the Council’s Constitution – sets out the conditions under which the public can be excluded from meetings of the Council).

9 Exempt notes of the previous meeting

15 - 16

The Panel is asked to **agree** the exempt notes of the meeting held on 4 December 2024 as a true and accurate record.

10 Budget 2025/2026 - Draft Report of the Budget Review Group

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor has drafted a report following the conclusion of the Budget Review Group meeting in December 2024 and January 2025, commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee in September 2024.

The final report will be considered at Scrutiny Committee on 29 January 2025, before being presented at Cabinet on 5 February 2025 and Council on 13 February 2025.

The Panel is asked to:

1. **Approve** the draft 2025/2026 Budget Review Group report for submission to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 29 January 2025 for approval and submission to Cabinet, subject to any necessary amendments.
2. **Delegate** authority to the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, in consultation with the Finance and Performance Panel Chair, to implement any agreed amendments to the report and make any necessary minor editorial amendments prior to submission to the Scrutiny Committee.

The report will be published as part of a supplementary agenda.

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

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

The Council asks those recording the meeting:

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

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

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

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

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

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

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

Declaring an interest

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

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

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

*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 Finance and Performance Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee) on Wednesday 4 December 2024

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Committee members present:

Councillor Fry (Chair)

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Smowton

Councillor Yeatman

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager

Laura Bessell, Benefits Manager

Paul Concannon, ODS Chief Operating Officer

Simon Howick, Managing Director, Direct Services Companies

Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

Also present:

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) - Finance and Asset Management,
Deputy Leader - Finance and Asset Management

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council
Companies, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies

Apologies:

No apologies were received

25. Apologies

None.

26. Declarations of Interest

None.

27. Chair's Announcements

Councillor Fry reminded Panel members the budget papers were published as part of a supplementary agenda for the meeting.

28. Finance and Performance Panel Work Plan

The Panel noted the workplan.

29. Report back on recommendations

The Panel noted the report.

30. Notes of the previous meeting

The Panel agreed the notes from the previous meeting.

31. Integrated Performance Report Q2 2024/25

Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services, Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager and Richard Woods, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager were in attendance to answer questions.

The Head of Financial Services introduced the report, noting the forecast update on the General Fund and Housing Revenue Account (HRA).

Councillor Jarvis asked about car parking income regarding the General Fund and if the Council was charging appropriately. The Head of Financial Services commented on the increase in income from Council's Park and Ride and further figures were expected by February.

Councillor Jarvis then commented in relation to temporary accommodation, the two figures presented on variance of 1.8m as opposed to 3m as initially predicted.

Councillor Smowton asked about staffing for the temporary accommodation and if there were challenges to recruiting Officers to posts. The Head of Financial Services responded there had been a reduction in performance within the service area and an increase in agency staff to cover busy periods. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager also noted that there was a push to move residents out of temporary accommodation to permanent accommodation within a two-year window.

Councillor Fry asked about the overspends in terms of evaluation fees and bank charges. The Head of Financial Services noted the increase in electronic payments, further audits and an increase in moving software to the cloud, which has a higher implementation fee.

Councillor Fry then asked about car park charges, with the Head of Financial Services that further details would be reviewed closer to Cabinet and Council in February 2025.

Councillor Jarvis asked about the variance within the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) for repairs. The Head of Financial Services responded that Officers were working with Oxford Direct Services to reduce the overspend in that area.

Councillor Snowton asked about the slippage column within the report. The Head of Financial Services responded that this was reverse slippage, where budget was brought forward to the following financial year.

Councillor Fry asked if there were any financial implications in contractors pulling out over the next 12 months. The Head of Financial Services that contracts were still going ahead but would have to be retendered if contractors pulled out, but budgets could be slipped.

Councillor Jarvis asked about the risk register, including the retention of lawyers. The Head of Financial Services responded that turnover within the legal team was a sector wide issue.

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

Cllr Jarvis left the meeting.

32. Business Rates Non-Payment and Systems Management

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager, and Laura Bessel, Benefits Service Delivery Manager were in attendance to introduce the report and answer questions.

The Head of Financial Services noted the addendum of the agenda, with the business rates across the city. The Benefits Service Delivery Manager commented on the process for collecting business rates each year.

Councillor Snowton asked about the substantial amount of debt that was collected in the previous year. The Benefits Service Delivery Manager commented on the process and the ongoing contracts with the enforcement agency.

Councillor Yeatman requested clarity on the empty premises and pop-up shops across the city. The Benefits Service Delivery Manager responded that occupation of the property is not always transparent, but the names on the property are liable to pay. It was also noted the charity shops have to be registered with the Charity Commission to apply for an exempt status.

Councillor Fry commented on the percentage of allocation within the report, and if there would be a change of policy. The Head of Financial Services responded that the figures are inflated each year based on the previous year's figures. The Financial Accounting Manager added that assumptions are made regarding future trends a calculation methodology and an allowance within the business rates calculation for cost of collection.

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

33. Supported Accommodation cost to City Council Finances

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services, Bill Lewis, Financial Accounting Manager Laura Bessel, Benefits Service Delivery Manager and Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager were in attendance to introduce the report and answer questions.

The Benefits Service Delivery Manager noted the increase and demand for independent living, which would be at the expense of the Council, and the number of residents that discharge from the NHS to supported accommodation. It was also commented that this was a similar issue within Cambridge and was working with local charities and organisations to address the type of accommodation that is rented.

Cllr Smowton: asked if this was an issue across the county and was there a correlation with non-unitary authorities. The Financial Accounting Manager responded that the issue within cities and similar to Cambridge, Oxford doesn't have enough appropriate landlords. It was also noted there would be legislation changes in the next 18 months regarding the licensing of support accommodation. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager also commented the further grants to support this and further conversations with the local NHS trusts.

Councillor Fry asked about the different housing providers. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager responded that further conversations had taken place and further details would be shared with the panel in due course.

Councillor Smowton asked about coordination between district and county Councils. The Benefits Service Delivery Manager commented that the City Council had worked with 10 other local authorities and had positive discussions with the Department of Work and Pensions to review the expenditure of local authorities.

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

34. Treasury Management Mid-Year Review - April to September 2024

The Financial Accounting Manager introduced the report, noting the variances going into the Monitoring Report.

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

35. Budget 2025/26

The Panel noted the report; there were no recommendations.

36. 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 the 'ODS – ODSTL Business Plan Refresh' 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.

37. ODS - ODSTL Business Plan Refresh

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

38. Budget 2025/26 - exempt appendix

The Panel noted the exempt appendix of the 2025/2026 Budget.

39. Dates of future meetings

The Panel noted the dates of the future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 9.00 pm

**Chair
January 2025**

Date: Wednesday 15

*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.*

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Finance and Performance Panel Work Plan

NB This work plan is provisional and is subject to change. Changes made outside meetings are agreed between the Scrutiny Officer and the Chair.

Cabinet items beyond two months in advance are not included on the work plan owing to the greater potential they will move or alternative items of higher priority arise in the meantime.

21 January 2025 [moved from 15 January] – confirmed reports

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Council Tax Reduction Scheme 2025/26	Yes	To consider the report and agree any recommendations.	Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management	Laura Bessell, Local Tax and Benefits Service Delivery Manager Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services
Report of the Budget Review Group	No	To approve the report of the Budget Review Group for submission to the Scrutiny Committee; and to recommend that the Scrutiny Committee approves the report of the Budget Review Group for submission to Cabinet.	Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management	Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

07 April 2025 – provisional reports

Agenda item	Cabinet item	Description	Cabinet portfolio	Lead officer
Social Value/Impact in Procurement and Update on the Procurement Act 2023/Procurement Regulations 2024	No	To consider the report and agree any recommendations.	Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management	Annette Osborne, Procurement Manager Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

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Agenda Item 9

By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

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