

Agenda

Scrutiny Committee

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Tuesday 3 February 2026**

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

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Committee Membership

Councillors: Membership 12: Quorum 4 substitutes are permitted.

Councillor Alex Powell (Chair)

Councillor Mike Rowley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan

Councillor Mohammed Azad

Councillor Tiago Corais

Councillor Chris Jarvis

Councillor Dr Amar Latif

Councillor Katherine Miles

Councillor Simon Ottino

Councillor Asima Qayyum

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

		Pages
1	Apologies for absence	
2	Declarations of interest	
3	Chair's Announcements	
4	Minutes of the previous meeting	9 - 24
	The Committee is asked to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 13 January 2026 as a true and accurate record.	
5	Addresses by members of the public	
	Public addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda. Up to five minutes is available for each public address.	
	The request to speak accompanied by the full text of the address must be received by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy by 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 28 January 2026.	
6	Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda	
	Councillor addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda. Up to five minutes is available for each address.	
	The request should be received by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy by 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 28 January 2026.	
7	Debt Recovery Procedure	25 - 28
	At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 October 2025, the Committee requested for an update on the council's debt recovery procedure. Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Manager, Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) and Philip McGaskill, Revenues Service Delivery Manager will be in attendance to present the report and	

answer questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.

8 Noticeboards Update

29 - 32

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 September 2025, the Committee requested an update on the Council owned noticeboards. Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive will be in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.

9 AI Strategy Update

33 - 44

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested a review of the Council's AI Strategy. Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies, Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens, and Helen Bishop, Director of Communities and Citizens' Services will be in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and agree any recommendations.

10 Budget Review Group Report

Appendix 3 to this item includes exempt information pursuant to Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972. If the Scrutiny Committee wishes to discuss matters relating to the information set out in Appendix 3 to the report, it will be necessary for the Scrutiny Committee to pass a resolution to exclude the press and public from the meeting.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor has submitted a report on behalf of the Chair of the Budget Review Group, following the Scrutiny Committee's agreement to establish a Budget Review Group at it's meeting on 10 June 2025 and approval of the Terms of Reference and Scope at it's meeting on 9 September 2025.

The Committee is recommended to:

1. **Endorse** the report and recommendations from the Budget Review Group.
2. **Delegate authority** to the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, to make

minor amendments to the report.

The report and appendices will be published as part of a supplement.

11 Scrutiny Work Plan

45 - 48

The Work Plan is driven to a very large extent by the [Cabinet Forward Plan](#). The Scrutiny Committee agrees its priorities for items coming onto the Forward Plan, which then form part of its Work Plan.

The Committee is recommended to confirm its agreement to the Work Plan, or agree any amendments as required.

12 Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

49 - 58

At its meeting on 21 January 2026, Cabinet considered the following reports from Scrutiny and made responses to the recommendations:

- Workforce Report
- Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045

The Committee is asked to:

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

13 Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

There have been no meetings of the Working Groups since the Scrutiny Committee's previous meeting on 13 January 2026.

14 Dates of future meetings

Scrutiny Committee

- 10 March 2026
- 7 April 2026

All meetings start at 6:00 pm.

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

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- 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.

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 13 January 2026

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Committee members present:

Councillor Powell (Chair)

Councillor Azad

Councillor Miles

Councillor Ottino

Councillor Stares

Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Corais

Councillor Mundy (substitute)

Councillor Qayyum

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Sobia Afridi, Diversity and Inclusion Specialist

Natalie Dobraszczyk, Planning Policy Team Leader

Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)

Gail Malkin, Head of People

Rachel Williams, Planning Policy Team Leader

Also present:

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

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Jarvis and Latif sent apologies.

82. Declarations of interest

The Chair advised Members to declare any communications with groups relating to the Local Plan, specifically those public speakers attending this meeting.

The Chair, Councillor Miles, Councillor Stares, and Councillor Rowley noted having received emails from those speaking at this meeting.

83. Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded the Committee and attendees of the process the Local Plan would follow, namely its route through the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet, and full Council on 26 January. It was clarified that the Scrutiny Committee has only the power to make recommendations, and that these would be passed to Cabinet for consideration.

84. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meetings held on 2 December 2025 as a true and accurate record.

85. Addresses by members of the public

The Committee heard two public addresses.

The Chair invited Deborah Glass Woodin from Oxfordshire Doughnut Economics to address the Committee. The address was delivered as follows:

There are several flaws in the Local Plan process & content that require your scrutiny:

1. The notion that the Scrutiny Committee can properly scrutinise a Local Plan of this length & complexity (over 900 pages including an unreadable policies map) in the course of a few days is unrealistic and procedurally flawed.

2. Important statutory information that is missing:

The officer report does not include even a summary of responses to the last consultation, never mind any explanation of changes made in light of that consultation or the reasons for ignoring consultee feedback. This does not meet essential transparency standards, nor fulfil the stated corporate priority to support thriving communities. The information needs to be provided before the plan can properly be considered.

3. Additional key information that is also lacking:

a) what is the proposed balance between new jobs (on one hand) & new housing & green spaces (on the other) in the city & how has this been reached?

In particular, has any of the land previously identified for employment use been firmly re-allocated for housing? This was a promised policy change around a common theme in many responses in previous consultations. If the plan continues to prioritise a huge increase in employment and economic growth over better provision for housing for the existing population's needs, especially genuinely affordable housing, then Oxford's housing crisis as well the related infrastructure issues including flooding, sewage, water scarcity, commuting, congestion, pollution and loss of green space in Oxford, will continue to get much worse.

b) what work has been done to measure the impact of the Local Plan on key measures of thriving & resilience?

4. The proposal is for the plan to move directly to the Reg 19 stage of consultation where feedback can be given only on specific and limited material matters. Why are Oxford City Council not following the process and best practise (as being undertaken by neighbouring districts), with a further Reg 18 Spatial Strategies stage of consultation? Moving straight to Reg 19 gives no opportunity for constructive feedback on sites.

In conclusion, these deficits in procedure & content present serious risks in achieving an appropriate balance in the corporate objectives for the Local Plan, risks that will have far-reaching impacts on how the city copes with the escalating multiple cases we face. What recommendations will the Scrutiny Committee make to address these risks so that the City Council produces a plan that is fit for the future for Oxford?

There were no questions from the Committee on this address.

The Chair then invited Martin Reed, Chair of the Friends of Iffley Fields, to address the Committee. The address was delivered as follows:

I am Martin Reed, Chair of Friends of Iffley Village speaking on behalf of Iffley's residents and visitors.

Your scrutiny is requested today, to review the soundness of the decision to re-allocate Land at Meadow Lane. This is a 2.5 acre greenfield plot which forms an integral part of the Iffley Conservation Area. There is now abundant expert evidence that any development here is unsustainable in planning terms. Including evidence of your own consultants.

Known locally as the Horse Fields in Iffley, there is now no realistic dispute that this site is of considerable significance: for wildlife, for heritage and for wellbeing as a treasured city-wide resource and should never have been considered for allocation. This meadow dates back to the Domesday Book, and unlike nearby green spaces has never been built nor used for landfill.

Unsustainable development

Rejected from earlier Local Plans due to access and heritage constraints, the Council's mistaken allocation to Local Plan 2036 and later application resulted in an unprecedented number of objections from residents and visitors to any development here: 60 000 on our petition and over 1000 objections (98% of respondents) to the first planning application in 2023. The main reasons they give are multiple and all of them relate to valid planning issues:

- 1. Destruction of the abundant wildlife here that sits along the Thames blue / green corridor: protected species, 636 species of invertebrates some rare at County and National level that qualify it easily as a City Wildlife Site*

2. Harms to the rural conservation area and drovers routes which are a much used Principal Quiet Route for Active Travel
3. Increased flood risk and pollution of the ancient ditch, river and Iffley Meadows SSSI across the Thames
4. Traffic and safety concerns, and unresolved queries about whether the areas needed for development are even fully owned by the Council

Objections have also been received from the following organisations and statutory bodies: The Environment Agency, Bucks, Berks and Oxfordshire Wildlife Trust, BugLife, Oxfordshire Badger Group, Oxford Urban Wildlife Group, Windrush Against Sewage, Cyclox, Oxford Pedestrian's Association, Greyfriars School, Oxford Preservation Trust.

Errors, omissions and inconsistencies

Given the wealth of factual information now elicited by the planning application, we are surprised also to see the number of ongoing errors, inconsistencies and omissions in the allocation that persist despite 2 earlier rounds of consultation feedback.

These errors, omissions and inconsistencies have the effect of making the allocation appear to be deliverable and sustainable when the evidence is to the contrary. That is not sound.

I'd like to highlight some of these for your scrutiny - you will find the policy listed as SPS8: Land at Meadow Lane on page 257 of your packs.

In the first table (p 257): The current use is not 'private green space' as stated. This land is held in public ownership by Oxford City Council's housing subsidiary. On any rational reading, this is public (publicly owned) land.

Notable heritage status applies to Iffley's rural Conservation Area of which the meadow itself is a vital part. The Conservation Area designation is about setting as well as material structures. The meadow is an integral and crucial part of that setting.

The list of notable ecological features fails to mention that the biodiversity found on the Council's own surveys is more than sufficient to qualify as a City Wildlife Site. The Council's own consultants concluded it was of County level importance for invertebrates alone.

Moreover, the recently published Local Nature Recovery Strategy rightly identifies the **whole** meadow as a restoration and enhancement priority, not just part of it as the policy claims.

In terms of Urban greening, given that achieving BNG is already highly unlikely (and impossible on site) no credence can be given to the claim 'likely to score above the urban greening factor target'. Nor is any evidence presented to that end. This is redolent of past mistakes where the site was assumed to be of low biodiversity value without any proper surveys to inform that view.

Looking at additional errors in the detailed points on p258, Open space, nature, flood risk.

- The site does not merely have 'Potential to become important for biodiversity' - the biodiversity is already of county and national significance and qualifies for City Wildlife Site status. This comment is misleading and Inconsistent with

section 3.17 of the Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2) which states that 'LNRs are intended to identify important areas for biodiversity as well as opportunity areas for its enhancement'. This is already a key extant resource.

- The policy states a requirement for 'a detailed assessment of the site's value for invertebrates' despite the Council having already done multiple ecological surveys, finding species of county and national rarity which is impossible to compensate or mitigate for. This comment indicates a disregard for what the council's surveys have already revealed and suggests an attempt to throw the dice again in the hope of a better answer.

These multiple errors and omissions draw into question the credibility and soundness of the Council's assessments and decision making in seeking to continue to allocate this site for development. Unfortunately, despite requests for the amended Reg 18 Site Assessment, the site assessment was not made available with the Reg 19 documents. That is a failure of publicity.

Ignores residents' input

We wonder how the Council can achieve their aim to 'get the Local Plan right' whilst steadfastly ignoring input from large numbers of residents.

For example, the early engagement survey elicited 50 emails from residents asking that Land at Meadow Lane should not be developed. The Council's engagement survey report highlighted 'cross-cutting themes, including the protection of green spaces, sustainable infrastructure (particularly sewage and flooding concerns), and the importance of aligning development with community health and wellbeing'.

It is unclear how any of this early engagement feedback was taken into account at Reg 18.

Currently Reg 18 Consultation feedback is not available. Surely scrutiny of the Reg19 stage of the Local Plan 2045 cannot proceed without the Consultation Report on the Reg 18?

Conclusion

Any development of Land at Meadow Lane is clearly unsustainable in planning terms, given the weight of evidence covering heritage, biodiversity, flooding, urban drainage and transport and the clear and unresolvable policy conflicts that have been exposed.

It is misleading to mask the extent of unsustainability with errors, omissions and inconsistencies in the Local Plan policies. Indeed, this is procedurally wrong.

It is contrary to the Local Plan stated objective to seek feedback but fail to take into account the overwhelming and ongoing level of valid objections from residents, statutory consultees and other expert bodies.

Finally, you will notice that the minimum number of houses for this allocation has been reduced from 32 in LP 2036 to effectively ZERO in LP 2045. Why exactly is the Council continuing to pursue harmful development here at all costs, particularly when this site is not needed to provide any material contribution to Oxford's housing need, and is not capable of doing so without breaching national and local nature conservation policy?

We invite the Scrutiny Committee to question how the expensive, resource intensive and risky process of continuing to pursue development plans on this ancient meadow is either politically advisable or financially viable.

Councillor Ottino asked what action Mr. Reed had taken to communicate with planning officers regarding the points raised in his address to the Committee, and whether he had received a response. Mr. Reed confirmed that he had attended a public consultation hosted by the planning officers at which time he raised some matters, however he is yet to receive a substantive written response.

Councillor Mundy joined the meeting during this address.

86. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda

None.

87. Workforce Report 2025

Cabinet, at its meeting on 21 January 2026, will consider a report to share current progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan and to present and seek approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2024/2025, the Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Focused Services and Council Companies, Gail Malkin, Head of People and Sobia Afrida, EDI Specialist, were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Chapman introduced the report and provided a comprehensive summary, noting that it represents data as of 31 March 2025 and includes information regarding gender, ethnic minority, and disability pay gaps. Councillor Chapman thanked the officers who have supported the work and praised the Council's achievements in relation to increasing workforce diversity. A summary of the EDI staff survey was delivered, and the Committee heard an explanation of external context linked to a reduction in the progress of improving the gender pay gap.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Rowley noted that Oxford City Council is one of few councils to publish such a breadth of data, however recognised that there has been a rise in pay gaps as more staff have been recruited. It was asked how this Council compares with other examples, and whether any analysis of the reasons for this issue has been completed.

The Head of People summarised a report commissioned by the Council seeking research relating to pay gaps and informed the Committee that recommendations had been made around intersectional data analysis, positive action, and KPIs for managers. The Head of People confirmed that the latter two recommendations have been implemented through ongoing work with service directors, however monitoring of data relating to promotions is yet to begin. The Committee understood that this data rests on the willingness of staff to share their personal data with the Council.

Councillor Miles firstly queried whether the positive progress against ethnic minorities targets meant that it could be increased to encourage further improvement, and secondly whether anything could be done to encourage men to opt for flexible working to promote more gender equality. Councillor Miles also asked whether action could be taken to ensure those who have the necessary skillsets, are not automatically locked onto lower pay brackets when recruited, specifically in reference to skills learned from informal employment. Finally, Councillor Miles whether data is disaggregated according to those who live within Oxford, and outside of the city, and whether more data on youth employment could be presented.

Councillor Chapman explained that disaggregation of data would be a task for the new authority which will emerge following Local Government Reorganisation and any new geographical boundaries. In relation to flexible working, the Committee were reminded of the Council's positive action schemes to support various skillsets and training and the successes these have achieved in focusing on the correct groups within the workforce.

In relation to targets, the Head of People explained that an increase to 17% would be appropriate to support an ambition to improve workforce diversity. In relation to flexible working, it was confirmed that some male employees are on part-time arrangements alongside other options. In response to Councillor Miles' query regarding pay scales, the Head of People noted that each grade contains two pay points, and all staff enter on the minimum, with variation from this requiring approval as a means of ensuring fair pay decisions. Furthermore, in 2025 an incremental progression plan was introduced to allow employees to move up the pay scale after a 6-month probationary period. The Committee heard a summary of findings from the last EDI survey which noted some instances of bullying or harassment in the workplace and work is ongoing to address these.

The EDI Specialist confirmed that analysis of the EDI survey results is underway, and development of an anonymous reporting system for bullying and harassment is ongoing. The Committee also heard an update on progress being made on with encouraging employment at the Council via schools, and the aspiring managers' scheme.

Councillor Corais queried the drop off between application and hiring stage for those from ethnic minority groups.

Councillor Ottino requested examples of ongoing outreach activities which aim to support increasing presence of ethnic minorities within the workforce.

The Chair, noting the awaited guidance from the EHRC, asked how the rights of trans and non-binary persons in the workplace will be impacted.

In response to Councillor Corais, Councillor Chapman explained that hiring is based on suitability for roles, regardless of ethnic background and the statistics represent those who have been selected based on merit and meeting the required criteria. The Head of People also noted that progress had been made in this area, referencing data within the report, and explained that anonymous applications have been introduced to reduce any bias in shortlisting. The Committee understood that further work on inclusive recruitment practices would be ongoing over the next year.

In response to the Chair, the Head of People recognised the impact that the EHRC guidance will have, and the difficulties faced by trans and non-binary colleagues. The Committee heard an update on the trans network designed to offer support, and the space this will open for sharing experiences.

The EDI Specialist outlined additional work and conversations which have been ongoing over the past year with colleagues, and the supportive environment this has enabled for employees to come forward with increased confidence.

Councillor Chapman emphasised the value the Council places on inclusive values and the focus and work which goes into continuously improving.

The Chair associated himself with Councillor Chapman's sentiments and invited discussion of possible recommendations.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:

1. That the current target for workforce representation of 17% for employees from minority ethnic groups be increased to a higher, evidence-based, figure in order to strengthen the Council's recruitment from these groups.
3. That Cabinet fully implement an anonymised, third-party reporting system, reflecting standard practice across the public and private sectors, to enable employees to raise concerns relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination, corruption and other workplace-related issues with confidence.
4. Acknowledging there are challenges posed by low staff numbers and reliability of available data in this area, that future workforce equality reports include a dedicated section on gender reassignment, recognising this as a protected characteristic.

The Chair thanked the officers and the Cabinet member.

Councillor Chapman, the Head of People, and the EDI Specialist left the meeting and did not return.

88. Local Plan 2045

Cabinet, at its meeting on 21 January 2026, will consider a report to recommend that Council approve the Proposed Submission Draft Local Plan 2045 for public consultation and, subject to the outcome of the consultation, if no matters are raised that materially impact upon the Plan strategy, to submit the Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045 to the Secretary of State for formal examination.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager, Sarah Harrison, Planning Policy Team Leader, and Natalie Dobraszczyk, Planning Policy Team Leader, were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Hollingsworth provided a comprehensive summary of the Local Plan 2045 report, emphasising that it must be compliant with the national planning policy framework (NPPF), and outline the process by which the current Local Plan has been through to this point. The Committee specifically heard a summary of housing need policy and the high housing demand in Oxford, with reference to some specific site allocations. Councillor Hollingsworth discussed Oxford's potential and its role as a city which positively contributes to national economic growth also. Councillor Hollingsworth concluded by thanking the officers for their dedicated work.

The Chair thanked Councillor Hollingsworth and invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Miles firstly queried whether the Local Plan considers the density of hot food takeaways in district centres, specifically possible maximum limits; Manchester was referred to as an example. Specifically, Councillor Miles considered the proximity of these retail units to schools. Secondly, Councillor Miles asked whether play for children has been considered within the plan, and finally, it was asked whether remerging subdivided dwellings (previously altered for caring reasons) will be considered in respect of the challenges posed to reconfiguring buildings at later points.

Councillor Ottino asked whether the policy will address inequalities in the city, beyond just the consideration of additional social housing. Examples of boosting economic development and employment in a manner which most benefits the least advantaged were suggested.

The Planning Policy Team Leader (SH), in response to Councillor Miles, clarified that policy C1 does restrict hot food takeaways in line with the NPPF, which, whilst allowing different approaches to be used, requires they be justified with evidence. In the case of Oxford, the Committee heard that sufficient evidence had not been found to deviate from the NPPF.

In reference to play for children, the Planning Policy Team Leader (ND) noted policies C2, G1 and G2, which generally seek to protect green spaces and open spaces which can be used for play. It was noted that the plan currently features sufficient flexibility around the concept of play, and due to the complexity of the concept and variable needs of different groups, it was preferred not to refine the wording further.

Finally, in reference to the splitting of dwellings for care purposes, Councillor Hollingsworth explained that the matter would be better considered via planning applications in the first instance, not the local plan. A summary of the complexities of this process was offered to the Committee. In response to Councillor Ottino, it was noted that the Local Plan considers community employment and procurement plans within policy E3 which makes commitments in relation to apprenticeships, rates of pay, and accessibility policies. The Committee heard of ongoing efforts to engage with local contractors and small businesses who are often excluded from these schemes in order to increase equality. Councillor Hollingsworth noted his hope that the planning inspector would receive this positively and offered examples such as the Oxford North scheme.

Councillor Mundy, in relation to policy G4 on biodiversity net gain, asked whether the proposed Local Plan has considered exceeding the expectations that were given by government in respect of new sites. It was asked whether the plan would consider exceeding 10%, and whether mapping and costings of potential advantages of this have been done. Secondly, Councillor Mundy requested that the glossary refer to the current rate of the Oxford living wage, and, queried why it is stipulated that contractors could have alternative social arrangements other than the Oxford living wage. Lastly, Councillor Mundy queried whether a higher percentage of social rent should be aimed for given the number of people waiting for a council home.

Councillor Stares expressed concern that homes and facilities are being built without consideration for developing communities. The Committee heard a summary of her experiences and the changes in Blackbird Leys since 1960; Councillor Stares emphasised that planning permission often is awarded to developers who provide nothing to the community.

In response to Councillor Mundy, the Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) explained that consideration was made of whether the Local Plan should seek to exceed the 10% target, however government regulations deter this unless specific evidence is available to justify the decision; it was not determined that Oxford had sufficient evidence for this. It was also confirmed that viability testing supported the affordability of the 10% target.

In relation to the social rent target of 80% of the 40% affordable housing, Councillor Hollingsworth acknowledged that this is a high rate and provided an explanation of the factors which are considered in balancing this. The Committee heard that the percentage of social housing affects the total amount of affordable housing that can be afforded.

In relation to the living wage, Planning Policy Team Leader (ND) committed to updating the glossary, and it was explained that additional information will be supplied within a technical advice note to support the plan to ensure clarity. The Committee heard that the policy is aimed at promoting the Oxford living wage and ensuring that necessary objectives are met to deal with inequalities.

In response to Councillor Stares, Councillor Hollingsworth acknowledged the fundamental issue of developing communities and pointed to aspects of the plan which address the issue. Councillor Hollingsworth provided a detailed response in relation to Armstrong Road, as referenced by Councillor Stares, and discussed the concept of district centres. Councillor Stares and Councillor Miles noted concern regarding the definition of district centres and drew on other local examples when discussing this with Councillor Hollingsworth. The Committee learned that the definition of a district centre is laid down in the NPPF. The Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) explained how this is defined in the NPPF and the exclusions made.

In response to this discussion, the Planning Policy and Place Manager referred the Committee to pages 205 and 206 of the draft plan which contained relevant policy information. The Committee heard that a centre must be as defined by law and this means it would be appropriate for a wide range of "Town Centre" uses, as listed in the report on page 206. Planning Policy and Place Manager also explained that a suite of additional and separate policies are present within the Plan to encourage development of communities.

Councillor Hollingsworth also referred the Committee to page 207 and discussed some specific examples with Councillor Ottino located in Blackbird Leys. Councillor Hollingsworth committed to looking at this outside of the meeting in order to refer to maps.

In relation to policy G4 and the biodiversity net gain, the Chair acknowledged comparisons with other Councils and asked whether consideration has been given to the potential to include a higher percentage requirement for biodiversity net gain.

Councillor Miles sought clarification in relation to the technical advice notes mentioned by officers. It was asked whether these would be created separately to elaborate on the local plan, and what would then constitute a topic that a note could be focused on. Councillor Miles also commented that there seems to be a lack of focus in the current local context on the planning needs of children which is distinct from the earlier topic of play. On this basis, it was asked whether there is scope to have either a technical

advice note or design code guidance around how developers can respond to the needs of children in planning terms.

In response to the Chair, the Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) explained that the constrained nature within Oxford makes it harder to justify a higher than 10% biodiversity net gain, as the focus is on redevelopment sites and not development of large green field sites where there is more scope for incorporating biodiversity. In response to Councillor Miles, the Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) explained how the children's needs have already been incorporated into the draft plan, including guidance relating to the need for street hierarchy to prioritise children. The Committee heard that this is elaborated on within the design code, and a separate technical advice note could be provided as there is no restriction on what can be included within a technical advice note; this is determined by what officers feel is needed to help explain how to meet policy requirements. In response to Councillor Miles, the Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) also provided a definition of technical advice notes, emphasising that they are to help explain how to meet policy requirements. Councillor Hollingsworth added that technical advice notes provide a very important set of guidance to increase the degree of certainty and confidence for applicants and for decision makers.

The Chair invited further questions.

Councillor Miles queried whether the consultation results could be published for reference and asked whether it is feasible for this to be done before proceeding to the next stage of the process. In agreement, the Chair also asked whether summaries of the consultation responses could be provided to Cabinet and to full Council.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager reassured the Committee that a comprehensive consultation statement will be published alongside the consultation following the Council's approval, as per the requirement of regulations.

The Chair invited questions related specifically to site allocations.

Councillor Miles referred to the earlier public addresses and the example of removal of land at Meadow Lane. The feasibility of this was questioned.

Councillor Hollingsworth summarised that the land is subject to a planning application and has previously been allocated for housing need; he acknowledged the contentious nature of this case. A summary of current housing need numbers was also provided to the Committee. The Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) explained that Meadow Lane is described as a private open space as it is owned by Oxford City Housing Limited. As such, it is not a public open space as it does not have public access and has been classified based on how the land is used. A summary of issues relating to this site were offered to the Committee, with acknowledgement of the conservation area.

Councillor Stares noted that the draft plan refers to Templars Square and expressed concern that it will lose all use as a shopping centre if residential units are developed in line with the numbers enclosed.

The Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) clarified that the policy requires it to remain functioning as an important district centre and a document will be published as part of the consultation to explain how the capacity of Templars Square was assessed and the choice of high-density designs. Councillor Hollingsworth referred Councillor Stares to policy SPS16 on page 275 which provided additional relevant detail. Members also heard that this builds on a previous recommendation from the Scrutiny Committee relating to strengthening wording around housing density.

The Chair invited any final questions.

Councillor Ottino reflected on the impact of homelessness in Oxford and the number of people trapped in the private rented sector. He emphasised that the approach to solving this must be a collective responsibility and it must be addressed across the board, with specific progress made towards upward building, rather than houses being built on riskier flood zones.

The Planning Policy Team Leader (SH) clarified that some of the flood zones mentioned within the report refer to sites at which only a small portion of the land falls on flood plain, and therefore the whole site has been noted as a flood risk.

Councillor Stares emphasise the need to build more homes, but also communities and places where people can be happy and supported.

The Chair invited discussion of possible recommendations.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:

1. For officers to undertake a further review of the areas in Greater Leys, in particular Dunnock Way, and other sites such as Littlemore to be allocated Local Centres under Policy C1, noting their similarities to Underhill Circus.
4. That the evidence-base is thoroughly examined to determine whether 10% biodiversity net gain is conclusively the most ambitious minimum the council could set.
5. For officers to explore whether a higher threshold for the acceptability of loss of sports facilities could be incorporated in the Local Plan.
5. For officers to reconsider the language in Policy C2(h) encouraging the development of city centre play amenity.

The Committee emphasised the importance of providing clear guidance on how planning can be designed to ensure Oxford creates child-friendly places and amenities, recognising that such practice has been adopted by other authorities. The Committee noted that children's needs should be addressed within the Local Plan policies, potentially through the Technical Advice Note. Acknowledging the current timeline for the Plan's implementation, the Committee requests that this matter be recorded and revisited in future.

The Committee also requested that a summary of the consultation results be made available to members ahead of Full Council on 26 January 2026 where the submission of the Draft Local Plan 2045 is due to be considered.

Councillor Miles left the meeting during the discussion of recommendations and did not return.

The Chair thanked officers and Cabinet Member.

Councillor Hollingsworth, the Planning Policy and Place Manager, and both Planning Policy Team Leaders left the meeting and did not return.

Councillor Rowley left the meeting.

89. Scrutiny Work Plan

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor informed the Committee that the Council Tax Debt Policy has been added to the February agenda, and that the sports pitches strategy had also been added to the programme, but that timing was under consideration with the date to be confirmed. In relation to noticeboards, the Committee were reminded that a briefing note had been distributed via email to all Members; the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor queried whether there was also a desire for this to be added to the February agenda. The Chair invited discussion of this; Members agreed that an item on noticeboards be added to the February agenda.

The Committee **agreed** to the Work Plan.

90. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

The Chair referred the Committee to the agenda for the detail of all recent recommendations to Cabinet and confirmed that all had been accepted.

The Committee **noted** Cabinet's responses to its recommendations.

91. Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

The Chair informed the Committee that there were no updates.

92. Dates of future meetings

The Committee **noted** the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.55 pm

Chair
2026

Date: Tuesday 3 February

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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To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 3 February 2026
Report of: Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer)
Title of Report: Debt Recovery Procedure

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update the Scrutiny Committee on the Council's procedures for the use of enforcement agents in debt recovery and measures in place to safeguard vulnerable residents.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Cllr Ed Turner, Deputy Leader (Statutory) and Cabinet Member for Asset and Finance Management
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
1. Note the report;
2. Agree any recommendations to Cabinet.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and overview

1. This report outlines Oxford City Council's procedures for the use of enforcement agents in debt recovery and the measures in place to safeguard vulnerable residents. It draws upon the Council's Corporate Debt Management Policy and related statutory guidance. The Council is committed to a fair, consistent, and proportionate approach to debt

recovery, ensuring that vulnerable households are protected from inappropriate enforcement activity.

2. Before any case is considered referral to enforcement agents, Oxford City Council exhausts a full range of non-enforcement recovery options designed to support residents, encourage engagement, and prevent escalation. These measures include issuing reminders and final notices, offering affordable repayment arrangements based on verified income and expenditure, and signposting individuals to independent debt-advice agencies for early intervention. The Council also reviews entitlement to benefits, reductions, discounts, exemptions, and discretionary support schemes such as Council Tax Hardship Relief, ensuring that residents receive all financial support available to them. Where appropriate, the Council may agree on temporary holds on recovery, reduced instalment plans, or long-term arrangements that reflect a resident's ability to pay. These approaches ensure that enforcement action is only taken where all reasonable alternatives have been explored, and the resident has either not engaged or has the means to pay but has chosen not to.

Use of Enforcement Agents

3. Enforcement agents (EAs) are used only after all internal recovery processes have been exhausted. Referral to enforcement agencies is used only where it is proportionate, and where the resident has not engaged with the Council or has deliberately avoided payment. Once a debt is assigned to an enforcement agent, the Revenues and Payments Service Delivery Manager ensure agents' behaviour conforms to the [Taking Control of Goods – National Standards](#).
4. During the 12 months in which the current contract was in place, only one complaint was received, the complaint related to the timing of the serving of a recovery document. The complaint was upheld by the Enforcement Agents, recovery action was withdrawn, and the case was resolved by agreement.

Preventing Vulnerable People Being Sent to Enforcement Agents

5. There is no single, definitive legal definition of "vulnerability." Instead, the term is interpreted broadly across national guidance, including the Taking Control of Goods: National Standards, which emphasises that vulnerability can arise from a wide range of circumstances. Vulnerability may be temporary, fluctuating, or long-term, and must always be assessed on a case-by-case basis in the context of an individual's personal, financial, or social situation.
6. Oxford City Council has multiple safeguards to prevent vulnerable households being referred to enforcement:
 - Early identification of vulnerability through regular contact with debtors
 - Pre- enforcement calls to prevent the imposition of avoidable additional cost
 - Staff training in safeguarding, vulnerability awareness, and debt recovery best practice
 - Coordinated sharing of information across departments
 - Partnership working with independent advice agencies
 - Case-by-case review prior to referral, assessing disability, mental health, language barriers, bereavement, domestic abuse, and other risk factors

When Enforcement Agents Identify Previously Unknown Vulnerability

7. Enforcement agents must immediately report any potential vulnerability to the Council and suspend enforcement action. The Council then:
- Suspend all enforcement activities
 - The case is reviewed by a Senior Recovery Officer
 - Who assesses income, expenditure, and support needs
 - Determines next steps, which may include recalling the case from enforcement, setting up an affordable repayment plan, or referring the resident to support services

The Management of Accounts After Vulnerability Is Confirmed

8. Once vulnerability is confirmed:
- Debts may be recalled from enforcement.
 - Recovery may be suspended while support is offered.
 - Affordable repayment arrangements are put in place.
 - Advice agencies are engaged as necessary.
 - Benefit entitlement and reliefs are reviewed.
 - Ongoing monitoring is undertaken to ensure resident wellbeing.

Conclusion

9. Oxford City Council has a robust and comprehensive framework for debt recovery that ensures enforcement is used only as a last resort, vulnerable residents are protected, and debt recovery is balanced with the welfare of our residents and our legal obligations being given equal consideration.

Report author	Phil McGaskill
Job title	Revenues Service Delivery Manager
Service area or department	Revenues
e-mail	pmcgaskill@oxford.gov.uk

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To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 3 February 2026
Report of: Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens
Title of Report: Noticeboard Update

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update the Scrutiny Committee following its request to review the processes and budgets concerning noticeboards.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
1. Note the report;
2. Agree any recommendations to Cabinet.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Introduction and overview

- As part of its discussion on Citizen and Community Engagement Policy in the September 2025, the Scrutiny Committee requested ‘clarity regarding the processes (and budgets) concerning noticeboards’.

2. There are circa 80 noticeboards across the City Council's communities. These are maintained by volunteers. The system is not overseen by a designated officer and there is also no dedicated budget to maintain their physical state.
3. This report presents 4 options for consideration. Some of the information in the report is based on work that is a number of years old, however officers have reviewed it and consider it represents a reasonable picture as to the current situation. Officers have not undertaken a fresh survey of noticeboards.

Current Situation

4. Each noticeboard has an appointed "noticeboard manager". They are responsible for general upkeep and keeping the content relevant and up to date. There are some gaps in coverage. Where there is an active noticeboard manager or community group notice boards are well-used, up-to-date and well maintained. There is no complaints or recourse system.
5. The City Council maintains the online data base of the contact details of each noticeboard manager, should interested parties want to display a public community notice. A list of vacant noticeboard manager roles is also available on the City Council's website, but there is no further specific advertising of these roles.
6. Many of the noticeboards carry the City Council's logo, and indicate they are owned and operated by the City Council.
7. There is no resource available to oversee or maintain these noticeboards. Boards are funded in an ad hoc manner through the use of CIL, member ward budgets or other miscellaneous funding.
8. The City Council is presently exploring software that can support communities to reach more people more effectively ie. Digital noticeboards.

Issues identified

9. In undertaking the review, some issues identified were:
 - There is no support for noticeboard managers from within the City Council. Control of noticeboard content is limited.
 - As a result, some noticeboards are well maintained, for others the content is out of date and relevance can be patchy especially in more deprived areas.
 - There is no centralised process for enabling content onto the noticeboards from community stakeholders.
 - There is no active management or re-recruitment of noticeboard managers.
 - Some of the noticeboards are in a poor state of repair and there is no process or budget to replace or maintain them.
 - The location of noticeboards needs to be reviewed.

Options to consider

10. As a way forward, members are presented with the following options to consider:

Option 1: Do nothing

- Pros
 - No additional ongoing costs

- Cons
 - Reputational risk
 - Safety risk from some hazardous noticeboards
 - Missed opportunity

Option 2: Withdraw support, de-brand and hand over to Noticeboard Managers

- Pros
 - Council would no longer have any associated risks
 - No additional costs
- Cons
 - No control over the content and communication via these boards
 - There could be a bigger impact in more deprived areas
 - Number of boards is likely to decline

Option 3: Continue with noticeboards, with City Council actively managing and operating the boards

- Pros
 - Still community run, but with a clear and identified support system from Oxford City Council.
 - More oversight and control of boards.
 - An introduction of a recognised process and channel for new notices to be put onto boards.
 - Opportunity to include online channels to reach communities
 - Noticeboards will be safe, and well-maintained.
- Cons
 - Capital and ongoing revenue budget required.
 - The role of the 'Noticeboard Officer' remains variable

Option 4: Outsource noticeboard management

- Pros
 - Noticeboards remain
 - Potentially at a lower cost
- Cons
 - Handing control of content from local communities to a third party.
 - Council still responsible for replacement and maintenance cost.
 - Risk of contract failure from supplier.

Financial implications

Capital and Revenue Costs of Installation, Replacement or Repair

11. It has been estimated that bringing the noticeboards up to standard would incur a capital one-off cost of circa £60k. This could include a small quota of additional noticeboards where required.
12. Maintaining these boards would require an ongoing revenue budget of circa £15k.

Capital Cost of Option Analysis

13. £15k to review the options including the opportunities for outsourcing and using online tools to reach communities

Ongoing Revenue Management Cost of Options 3 and 4

14. £20k for either internal management costs for overseeing the operation or for outsourcing.

Costed Proposal

15.

Activity	Capital One-off £k	Revenue Ongoing £k
Feasibility study to explore options	15	
Installation, replacement or repair of noticeboards	60	
Internal or outsourced management		20
Ongoing maintenance of noticeboards		15
Totals	75	35

Report author	Tom Hook
Job title	Deputy Chief Executive
Service area or department	City and Citizens
e-mail	thook@oxford.gov.uk

To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 3 February 2026
Report of: Director of Communities and Citizens' Services
Title of Report: AI Strategy Update

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update the Scrutiny Committee on the Council's AI Strategy.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies
Corporate Priority:	Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Citizen Experience Strategy 2025-2027

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
1. Note the AI Strategy attached as Appendix 1;
2. Agree any recommendations.

Information Exempt From Publication	
No	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy	No

Introduction and overview

1. At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested a review of the Council's AI Strategy.
2. This report outlines Oxford City Council's AI Strategy developed to provide a clear framework for the responsible and ethical use of AI across the Council's services and operations. It sets out a clear vision and objective for its use, alongside governance arrangements required to support safe and lawful implementation. The report also

identifies the critical factors required for delivery and summarises progress made to date, including activities completed during 2024-25 and the action plan for this year.

Report author	Helen Bishop
Job title	Director of Communities and Citizens' Services
Service area or department	Communities and Citizens' Services
e-mail	Hbishop@oxford.gov.uk

Artificial Intelligence (AI) Strategy

Approved by Organisational Change Board 8/12/25

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1. Introduction

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is transforming the way local governments operate, offering opportunities to enhance service delivery, drive efficiencies, and increase citizen engagement. With rapid technological advances and growing expectations for responsive digital services, now is a critical moment for Oxford City Council ('the Council') to act. This strategy sets out our approach to harnessing AI's potential while ensuring ethical, transparent and responsible implementation.

What we mean by AI

AI describes computer systems which can perform tasks usually requiring human intelligence. This strategy concerns Generative AI, a class of technologies that produce new content in response to requests from users and are based on machine learning and using very large volumes of data. The Council's AI Policy provides a more detailed definition and examples.

2. Vision and Objectives

[Oxford City Council's Strategy 2024-28](#) sets out our five strategic aims:

- Good, affordable homes
- Strong, fair economy
- Thriving Communities
- Zero Carbon Oxford
- A well-run council.

AI is a powerful tool to help us achieve these goals – whether by improving how we engage with citizens, enhancing data-driven decision-making or enabling smarter, more efficient service delivery and better use of public funds. By analysing data intelligently, automating repetitive tasks and making information more accessible, AI can help staff respond to citizens' needs more quickly, personalise services, and allocate resources where they are most needed.

Our vision is to embed AI across the Council in a way that improves our citizen experience, enhances the capability of employees and helps us deliver smarter, sustainable services while maintaining ethical oversight and inclusive values. We aim to reach a point where:

- All staff are confident and capable in using AI tools safely and ethically to support routine tasks and data-led decision-making
- AI serves as an assistant, not a replacement – human oversight and accountability are always present
- The use of AI leads to improved services and more efficient use of public resources, while protecting the contributions of the workforce.

Objectives

1. AI literacy and collaboration

We will provide tailored workshops, training pathways and resources for staff to ensure all service areas are equipped to adopt and benefit from AI technologies.

We will work collaboratively, supporting cross-departmental learning and experimentation and engaging in wider networks, to develop new ideas and scalable solutions.

2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation

We will maintain accountability and compliance with data protection laws, as outlined in the [Oxford City Council AI Policy](#).

We will embed fairness, transparency and environmental responsibility into all AI initiatives, with clear governance to monitor impacts and mitigate risks.

We will apply AI where it adds genuine value, while preserving human contact, judgement and creative problem-solving in areas where these remain essential to delivering trusted and empathetic public services.

We will take a pragmatic approach to AI implementation, piloting use cases where feasible and assessing safety, ethics and value before investing in new technologies.

3. Improved service efficiency

We will deploy AI tools to streamline administrative tasks, reduce costs, and improve productivity, enabling better use of resources and quicker resolution of citizen queries.

We will use AI to support our broader 'digital first' initiatives, so we can prioritise our non-digital help for people with most need.

We will take an evidence-based approach to scaling up AI initiatives: establishing goals and business needs; monitoring results and Return on Investment (ROI); and managing the whole AI lifecycle.

4. Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience

Our [Citizen Experience Strategy](#) underlines our commitment to put citizens at the heart of service design and delivery. We will use AI-driven insights to better understand the needs of our citizens and to shape services that reflect the experiences of Oxford's diverse communities, incorporating consultation and feedback.

We will deploy AI-driven tools to simplify communication and personalise support across multiple channels.

We will ensure services using AI are accessible to all, including those without digital access and those who may be wary of AI, so that no-one is left behind.

5. Environmental sustainability

We will be mindful of the environmental impact of AI initiatives and provide training for all employees in using AI in energy-efficient ways that support our zero carbon goals.

6. Leveraging existing technologies and data

We will integrate AI with existing tools such as Power BI and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to optimise performance, enhance data analysis and improve data-led decision making.

We will ensure that key data sets are structured, accessible and maintained for quality to be AI-ready, enabling reliable and responsible use of AI across services.

3. Principles for AI Use

Oxford City Council will adhere to the following principles when implementing AI solutions:

- 3.1 Empowerment:** AI should support staff in delivering safer, more efficient, and equitable services. Organisational change initiatives will ensure staff are engaged and supported through the transition.
- 3.2 Transparency and Public Trust:** Transparent communication and clear messaging will be used to build and maintain public trust, including assurance of data being protected. Stakeholders will be clearly informed where AI has played a significant part in decision-making, with proactive communication to staff and citizens when they are interacting with AI, beyond updates to privacy statements.
- 3.3 Explainability:** AI tools must be understandable by staff, and the Council must be able to explain how decisions are made.
- 3.4 Accountability:** Human oversight will be maintained for all AI-enabled decisions, ensuring human control over and responsibility for AI outputs.
- 3.5 Data Security & Privacy:** Compliance with UK GDPR and other relevant data protection policies, ensuring explainability, data minimisation, and the right to object to automated decision-making.
- 3.6 Inclusivity & Equity:** AI should improve accessibility and equality in service delivery, supported by Equality Impact Assessments and audits to ensure fairness and mitigate for bias.
- 3.7 Sustainability:** AI solutions should align with the Council's broader sustainability goals, with sustainability expertise included for procurement, process design and

implementation. This will support consideration of environmental impacts, including energy use, carbon and water footprint.

- 3.8 Collaboration:** Ongoing engagement with the LGA AI network, Multiverse community, and other councils to support shared learning.
- 3.9 Ethical Foundations:** AI deployment will be guided by established ethical frameworks, including the UK Government Office for AI's principles and LGA guidance.

4. Governance

A structured governance framework will oversee AI adoption across the Council:

- 4.1 AI Policy & Ethical Guidelines:** An AI policy, to be reviewed annually, supplemented by a practical toolkit, will guide staff in using AI responsibly and sustainably.
- 4.2 AI Steering Group:** A multi-disciplinary steering group will assess high-impact AI applications for compliance and ethical considerations. Its Terms of Reference will define membership (including Legal, ICT, data, sustainability, equalities, and service leads), meeting frequency (initially monthly), and responsibilities (such as reviewing high-risk applications, maintaining a risk register, signing off training programmes, conducting ethics assessments, overseeing communications, setting evaluation frameworks, monitoring progress on the action plan and setting escalation protocols). The steering group will be chaired by a senior officer and will explore the inclusion of external or lay voices to ensure appropriate challenge and independence. The AI Steering Group will report into the Organisational Change Board (OCB), providing regular updates and recommendations to support strategic oversight and alignment with organisational priorities.
- 4.3 Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs):** Required for all AI systems handling personal or sensitive data.
- 4.4 Equality Impact Assessments (EqIAs):** Required where AI may affect accessibility, service delivery, or equality outcomes.
- 4.5 Environmental Impact Assessments:** Required where AI may have a significant energy use or other environmental impact
- 4.6 Procurement Standards:** All AI procurements must meet the Council's ethical and data standards and comply with guidance from the LGA.
- 4.7 Monitoring and Evaluation:** A robust framework will be introduced to assess the success and impact of AI systems. This will include performance indicators, fairness metrics, environmental assessments, and mechanisms for incorporating citizen feedback.
- 4.8 These governance arrangements will be reviewed** whenever necessary, and annually as a minimum, to adapt to the fast evolving external environment and changing opportunities and risks.
- 4.9 This strategy will be formally reviewed and refreshed in December 2026**, with interim progress monitored by the Organisational Change Board through key milestones, governance updates, and feedback mechanisms such as the annual staff survey and service performance reports. The review will consider technological developments, regulatory changes, and organisational readiness.

5. Critical factors for success

- 5.1** Continued backing from senior leaders, elected members, and service heads to embed AI across the Council.
- 5.2** Clear messaging that AI supports – not replaces – the workforce.
- 5.3** Practical, tiered training (e.g. awareness for all staff; advanced use for analysts and planners).
- 5.4** Peer-led learning and shared pilots with partners (e.g. LGA, Multiverse).
- 5.5** Ensuring that there is testing and benchmarking of AI solutions to enable compliant and reliable deployment in high-impact, low-risk areas as well as enabling the testing of innovative new ideas.
- 5.6** Avoiding overreach into complex automation before governance structures are proven.
- 5.7** Operationalising the AI Steering Group and embedding DPIAs/EqIAs into early-stage thinking.
- 5.8** Transparent policies on explainability, data use, sustainability and human oversight.
- 5.9** Proactive engagement with unions and staff to build confidence.
- 5.10** Clear public communication to ensure trust and reduce AI-related anxieties.
- 5.11** Continued leverage of LGA networks, pilot consortiums, and neighbouring councils to share costs, lessons, and models.

Appendix A: Activities completed 2024-25

Our AI Steering Group was formed in early 2024. The table summarises progress to date against the six objectives of the strategy.

Objective	Progress to date
1. AI Literacy and collaboration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Organisation-wide digital skills assessment conducted • Programme of digital skills training delivered at three levels, open to all employees • Programme of apprenticeships launched, with 50+ employees working towards qualifications in AI, data and business transformation • Work with Change Agents Network to develop and share Copilot guidance and use case examples
2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic and evidence-informed approach to AI established, investing in skills, governance and trialling use cases • AI Steering Group established to collaborate on policies and guidance, oversee AI initiatives and mitigate risks • 'Using AI at Work' policy, guidance and toolkit published • Apprenticeships programme (see objective 1)
3. Improved service efficiency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pilot of 56 Copilot Pro licences launched across service areas (36 for employees undertaking apprenticeships and 20 others) • Series of workshops delivered, examining potential Return On Investment (ROI) of use cases across 6 service areas
4. Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use case workshops delivered (see objective 3) • Health Check completed of the Contact Centre and Intent Call Analysis procured to advise on further AI opportunities.
5. Environmental sustainability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic and evidence-informed approach to AI established, investing in skills, governance and trialling use cases
6. Leveraging existing technologies and data	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Citizen Contact Data Cleansing Options Report produced and recommendations approved. • Improved use of AI for creating, visualising, and analysing data sets for evidence and data-led decision making

Appendix B: Action Plan to December 2026

Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
1. AI Literacy and collaboration	Continue to support the apprenticeship programme and collate use cases and learning	People Team	Dec '25 – Dec '26
	Deliver 'AI Bitesize' training for all staff	People Team	Jan – March '26
	Publish training recordings	Change Support Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Update 'Using AI at Work' intranet guidance	Change Support Team	Nov '25 – Dec '26
	Support Change Agents to enthuse and guide colleagues	Change Support Team	Ongoing
	Deliver workshop(s) for Business Leads in all service areas, to explore transformative opportunities through AI	People Team	Nov '25
2. Safe, ethical and transparent implementation	Deliver 'AI Bitesize' sessions on safe and ethical use of AI	People Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Share guidance and recording on safe and ethical use of AI	People Team	March '26
	Develop and implement a framework for assessing risk levels in new AI initiatives and testing safety, transparency, GDPR compliance, fairness and energy use before implementation	Change Support Team	March '26
	Develop and implement a framework for assessing, authorising and monitoring use of Copilot Agents	ICT	March '26
	Create and develop a live list of AI approved tools and a monitoring and audit process for AI supported systems and processes	ICT	March '26
	Incorporate AI safety and ethical use into GDPR training and guidance	Information Governance	March '26
3. Improved service	Deliver workshop for business leads (see objective 1)	People Team	Nov '25

Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
efficiency	Provide business analysis support to ensure projects have clear goals and tools for measuring progress and ROI	Change Support Team	Ongoing
	Through apprenticeship cohort, monitor potential for ROI and service improvements, and identify where Copilot Pro licences will have greatest impact	People Team	March '26
	Keep a central record of projects and benefits, to enable scaling of high impact solutions	Change Support Team	Jan '26
	Engage with LGA AI Hub, Multiverse Community Forums and other local government networks to explore practical applications	ICT	Ongoing
	Engage with South East Employers AI Network to explore ethical considerations and practical applications	People Team	Ongoing
	Trial use of Copilot to streamline administration of job evaluation process	People Team	
	Engage with the business via Service Directors to ensure AI is embedded into service planning and delivers ROI	Change Support Team	Dec '25 and ongoing
4. Enhanced public engagement and citizen experience	Trial use of Copilot to streamline licensing and application queries and resolve more issues at first point of contact.	Customer Services	Dec '26
	Explore use of AI for analysis of public consultations	Planning	July '26
	Complete intent call analysis of the calls to the Contact Centre to understand where we can use AI to better respond and manage calls	Customer Services	April – June '26
5. Environmental sustainability	Cover energy efficiency in 'AI Bitesize' training	People Team	Nov '25 – March '26
	Cover energy efficiency in Business Leads workshops	People Team	Nov '25
	Establish framework for environmental impact assessments in new AI initiatives	Environmental Sustainability	

Objective	Actions	Lead	Timeframe
6. Leveraging existing technologies and data	Expand Power BI dashboards with real-time data and exploit RPA and Power Platform integration	ICT	
	Implement data cleansing of citizen contact data to better enable uptake of digital solutions	Change Support Team	

Appendix C: Indicators for Success

		By
1	50 employees gain qualifications in AI, data or business transformation	Dec '26
2	Over 30% of employees in every service area actively use Copilot Chat	Dec '26
3	No significant data breaches or negative equality impacts	Ongoing
4	Case studies shared of successful implementation showcasing fairness, transparency and environmental responsibility	Dec '26
5	Use cases recorded and shared, identifying opportunities for ROI	Dec '26
6	Delivery of contribution to £200K savings target for financial year 2027-28	March '27
7	Environmental Impact Assessments completed	
8	Improved use of AI for creating, visualising, and analysing data sets for evidence and data-led decision making	

Scrutiny Work Plan

February 2026 to April 2026

www.oxford.gov.uk



The Scrutiny Committee agrees an annual work plan detailing key issues – affecting Oxford and its people – selected for review. While the plan sets out the work of scrutiny for the year, it also includes flexibility to address topical issues and forthcoming Cabinet decisions as they arise.

The Work Plan is informed by suggestions received from elected members and senior officers, and it is reviewed at every Scrutiny Committee meeting to ensure it remains current and relevant. Members of the public are invited to contribute topics for consideration by submitting a [suggestion form](#). See our [Get Involved](#) webpage for further details on how you can participate in the work of scrutiny.

Topics included in the plan may be examined directly by the Scrutiny Committee, delegated to standing Working Groups, or explored in greater depth by time-limited Review Groups. Recommendations from the Working Groups and Review Groups need to be endorsed by the Committee.

The Committee also reviews the Council's [Forward Plan](#) at each meeting and determines which Cabinet decisions it wishes to consider before the decision is made. In addition, the Council has a 'call in' process to allow decisions made by the Cabinet to be reviewed by the Committee before they are implemented.

Scrutiny Committee

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	Council Tax Debt Collection
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	AI Strategy
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	Noticeboards Update
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	Budget Review Group Report

Housing and Homelessness Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	18 February 2026	No items

Climate and Environment Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 February 2026	Net Zero Tracker
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 February 2026	Heat Network Update
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 February 2026	EV Infrastructure Update
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 February 2026	Shared Prosperity Fund Allocation and Green Skills

Scrutiny Committee

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	10 March 2026	Fly-tipping and Litter Management
Scrutiny Committee	10 March 2026	Nighttime Economy
Scrutiny Committee	10 March 2026	More Leisure Annual Service Plan (Year 3) and Update

Finance and Performance Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 March 2026	Procurement Act Update (including social value and impact)
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 March 2026	Issues faced by the Local Government Sector and how Oxford City Council Compares
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 March 2026	Quarterly Integrated Performance Report - Q3 2025/26

Housing and Homelessness Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
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Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	31 March 2026	Housing Performance
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	31 March 2026	Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	31 March 2026	Temporary Accommodation and Homelessness Update

Climate and Environment Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	1 April 2026	Biodiversity Strategy Update
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	1 April 2026	Biodiversity Net Gain Feasibility Study
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	1 April 2026	Local Area Energy Planning Update

Scrutiny Committee

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Scrutiny Committee	7 April 2026	Urgent Key Decisions Update
Scrutiny Committee	7 April 2026	Watercourses and Ditches

Finance and Performance Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	14 April 2026	No items

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To: Cabinet
Date: 21 January 2026
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	A Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Cabinet:
1. Consider and respond to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Overview and Summary

- The Scrutiny Committee met on 13 January 2026 and reviewed the following items:
 - Workforce Equality Update
 - Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045
- Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants the power to the Scrutiny Committee to make reports or recommendations to the Cabinet with respect to the

discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive; and on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.

3. Following the meetings, Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers were asked to agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations.
4. The tables below detail the recommendations made by the Scrutiny for each report, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 21 January 2026. Cabinet has provided commentaries to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
5. The Committee wish to put on record:
 - In discussing the proposed submission of the Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045, the Committee was minded to emphasise the importance of providing clear guidance on how planning can be designed to ensure Oxford creates child-friendly places and amenities, recognising that such practice has been adopted by other authorities. The Committee noted that children's needs should be addressed within the Local Plan policies, potentially through the Technical Advice Note. Acknowledging the current timeline for the Plan's implementation, the Committee requests that this matter be recorded and revisited in future.
6. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting held on 13 January 2026 can be viewed [here](#).
7. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the Cabinet particularly Cllr Nigel Chapman (Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies) and Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (Planning and Culture) for their collaborative engagement with Scrutiny. The Committee was also grateful to Gail Malkin (Head of People), Sobia Afrida (EDI Specialist), Rachel Williams (Planning Policy and Place Manager), Sarah Harrison (Planning Policy Team Leader), and Natalie Dobraszczyk (Planning Policy Team Leader) for their work on the reports presented and responding to questions.

Financial implications

8. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
9. Where appropriate, any further financial implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Legal issues

10. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
11. Where appropriate, any further legal implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Level of risk

12. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
13. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

14. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
15. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

16. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
17. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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

**Table 1 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Workforce Equality Update**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2026 concerning the Workforce Equality Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the current target for workforce representation of 17% for employees from minority ethnic groups be increased to a higher, evidence-based, figure in order to restrengthen the Council's recruitment from these groups.	Yes	The Council has achieved its current, formal target of 16.5% and has since been working towards 17%. It is appropriate to increase the target.
2) That Cabinet fully implement an anonymised, third-party reporting system, reflecting standard practice across the public and private sectors, to enable employees to raise concerns relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination, corruption and other workplace-related issues with confidence.	Yes	The Council is currently exploring options for a service. One provider is quoting around £300 per month plus vat for the service for the Council's workforce. An internal solution would not incur extra costs but would take up staff time.
3) Acknowledging there are challenges posed by low staff numbers and reliability of available data in this area, that future workforce equality reports include a dedicated section on gender reassignment, recognising this as a protected characteristic.	Yes, in part	As this group of employees is small and hesitant about sharing personal data, we do not wish to highlight numerical data on the group but would be happy to refer to the work we are doing to support employees and acknowledge gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. Non-binary, trans and gender questioning employees would be included. A separate section may not be required but this will be considered.

**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2026 concerning the Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) For officers to undertake a further review of the areas in Greater Leys, in particular Dunnock Way, and other sites such as Littlemore to be allocated Local Centres under Policy C1, noting their similarities to Underhill Circus.		Officers will carry out a further analysis of the list of Local Centres.
2) That the evidence-base is thoroughly examined to determine whether 10% biodiversity net gain is conclusively the most ambitious minimum the council could set.		Officers have reviewed the position and can confirm the following: The Environment Act 2021 sets a statutory biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10%. The Planning Practice Guidance was updated last year to say that local plans should not seek a higher percentage than this statutory level ‘unless justified’. To support a higher percentage we would need robust evidence to justify this approach, which would need to look at specific local need, as well as demonstrating opportunities to deliver it and looking at the impact on development viability. Because of the constrained nature of Oxford and the limited opportunities for development, and indeed for achieving BNG within the city, this is not considered to be an approach that could be justified and evidenced.
3) For officers to explore whether a higher threshold for the acceptability of loss of sports facilities could be incorporated in the Local Plan.		In the development of the Plan officers have reviewed all the green spaces in the city, and in some cases go further than the NPPF by attempting to preserve spaces in situ, because of their important functions that justify this and

		make it difficult to re-provide, e.g. as a wildlife corridor of functional floodplain. Other spaces are part of the supporting Green Infrastructure network, and these spaces follow the NPPF approach that development may be justified if re-provision can be made, or if they are shown to be surplus. We do not have a surplus of pitches, so pitches in use do require re-provision. Reprovision needs to be of equivalent or better quality and capacity but not necessarily quantity, so sometimes a smaller area of pitches, or enhanced pitches elsewhere, that can provide the same level of use, may be accepted.
4) For officers to reconsider the language in Policy C2(h) encouraging the development of city centre play amenity.		<p>The Plan is very supportive of play space and specifically in including this in our centres, for example: in Policy C2 about maintaining vibrant centres (which includes the city centre): <i>"enhancement and new opportunities for public realm and landscaping such as tree planting, including incorporation of small green spaces where people can stop, dwell, socialise and play;"</i>.</p> <p>There is policy support elsewhere in the Plan too, Policy G1: protection of green infrastructure states: <i>"Proposals impacting the following types of open space will need to be accompanied by additional evidence that demonstrates consideration of the following:....b) Parks and gardens, accessible greenspace and amenity greenspaces: i) the role of the space in supporting people to socialize, take part in informal recreation (particularly where facilities like children/youth play and outdoor gym equipment are present), or as an escape from the urban environment,"</i></p> <p>Also, in Policy G2: enhancement of green and blue infrastructure says proposals should demonstrate how they've considered: <i>"Health and wellbeing, including</i></p>

		<p><i>facilitating recreation and play for people of all age groups and abilities, particularly children and teenagers;”</i></p> <p>More broadly, the City Council supports the concept of a play space in the city centre, however, without a site having been identified, there is little more the Local Plan can do to deliver it.</p>
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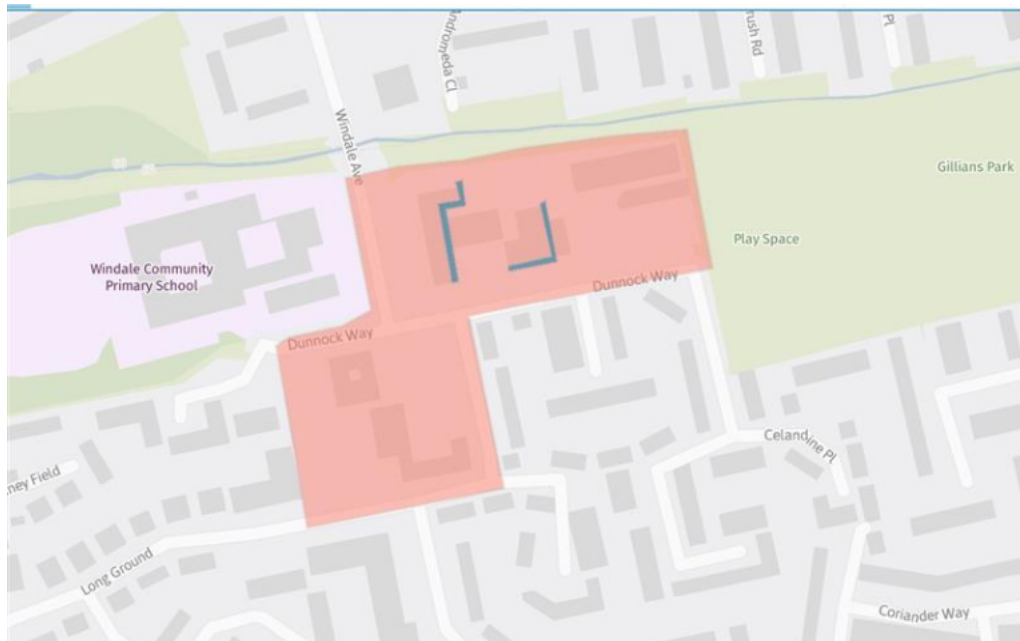
Scrutiny Recommendation – Local Centres

Scrutiny Committee recommended a review the defined local centres. District centres, local centres and the city centre, once defined, are treated as town centres in accordance with the NPPF. The intention of Policy C1 is to identify centres that meet the NPPF definition of a town centre, and which are therefore the centres to which new town centre uses are directed first. Town centre uses are also defined by the NPPF and are wide ranging. They include bars and pubs, nightclubs, health and fitness centres, offices, and visitor attractions. This is the main reason for designating centres. In addition, active frontages are defined within all centres. Within these active frontages, a proportion of Use Class E should be retained at ground floor level as set out in Policy C2. Therefore, local centres need to be considered suitable for a range of town centre uses and they need to have existing active frontage.

The NPPF is very clear that local centres must have more than neighbourhood significance, and must be more than a small parade of shops. In considering whether a centre has wider than neighbourhood significance, an important factor is whether there is a nearby larger centre that will serve the wider area. Also important is the variety and range of what is available.

Having reviewed our defined centres, officers do not consider that any should be removed from the list. However, there is a case to make for defining a Greater Leys local centre. Whilst there are few shops here, and it is also close to Blackbird Leys, there is a wide range of other facilities well on a par with other local centres that are defined. This shows that the centre is suitable for and can support a range of town centre uses.

Proposed additional local centre at Greater Leys:



However, officers are unable to see that there is enough of a cluster of uses in Littlemore where a local centre (suitable for town centre uses) or active frontage could be defined, and certainly not that have more than a neighbourhood significance. However, as noted, existing facilities would be protected and supported by other policies of the Plan.