

Agenda

www.oxford.gov.uk



Scrutiny Committee

This meeting will be held on:

Date: **Tuesday 10 March 2026**

Time: **6.15 pm**

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

For further information please contact:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor

☎ 07485 309899

✉ DemocraticServices@oxford.gov.uk

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

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

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

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

View or subscribe to updates for agendas, reports and minutes at mycouncil.oxford.gov.uk.

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

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

Councillor James Taylor

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 - 20
<p>The Committee is asked to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 3 February 2026 as a true and accurate record.</p>	
5 Addresses by members of the public	
<p>Public addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda. Up to five minutes is available for each public address.</p> <p>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, 4 March 2026.</p>	
6 Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda	
<p>Councillor addresses relating to matters of business for this agenda. Up to five minutes is available for each address.</p> <p>The request should be received by the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy by 5.00 pm on Wednesday, 4 March 2026.</p>	
7 More Leisure Annual Service Plan (Year 3) and Update	21 - 80
<p>Cabinet, at it's meeting on 18 March 2026 will consider a report to update Cabinet on the highlights of the second year of the new leisure contract and approve the Annual Service Plan 2026-27, which is an annual requirement of the operator, aiming to align outcomes to the Council's priorities and to address health inequalities.</p>	

Councillor Chewe Munknge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford, Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager and James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager have been invited to present the report and take part in discussions.

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

8 Nighttime Economy

81 - 90

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested an update on the Council's work to support the nighttime economy.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, and Diana Fawcett, City Centre Manager, will be in attendance to present the presentation and answer questions.

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

9 Fly-tipping and Litter Management

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested an update on the Council's work to mitigate fly-tipping and the work on litter management.

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies, Helen Bishop, Director of Communities and Citizens Services and Tina Mould, Environment Sustainability Business Lead will be in attendance to present the report and answer questions.

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

The report will be published in a supplement ahead of the meeting.

10 Scrutiny Work Plan

91 - 94

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.

11 Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

95 - 128

At its meeting on 11 February 2026, Cabinet considered the following reports from Scrutiny and made responses to the recommendations:

- Debt Recovery Procedure
- Noticeboards Update
- AI Strategy
- Budget Review Group Report

The Committee is asked to:

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

12 Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

129 -
132

Since the Scrutiny Committee's previous meeting on 3 February 2026, the following Working Groups have met:

- Climate and Environment Working Group (25 February 2026)
- Housing and Homelessness Working Group (26 February 2026)

The Committee is asked to:

1. **Endorse** the recommendations from Working Groups.

13 Dates of future meetings

Scrutiny Committee

- 7 April 2026

All meetings start at 6:00 pm.

Information for those attending

Recording and reporting on meetings held in public

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

The Council asks those recording the meeting:

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

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

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

Councillors declaring interests

General duty

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

What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?

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

Declaring an interest

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

Members' Code of Conduct and public perception

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

*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 3 February 2026

www.oxford.gov.uk



Committee members present:

Councillor Powell (Chair)	Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Azad	Councillor Corais
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Miles
Councillor Ottino	Councillor Qayyum
Councillor Stares	Councillor Taylor

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Helen Bishop, Director of Communities & Citizens
Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive - Citizen and City Services
Nigel Kennedy, Group Director Finance
Phil McGaskill, Revenues Manager
Becky Willis, Programme Manager - People Programme Manager

Also present:

Councillor Ed Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management
Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

It was noted that Councillor Taylor would be arriving late.

93. Declarations of interest

None.

94. Chair's Announcements

The Chair reminded Members to indicate whether they wished to discuss the exempt appendix relating to item 10; if so, the Committee would be required to enter confidential session, and the public would be excluded.

The Chair also welcomed Councillor Taylor to the Committee following his appointment at the last meeting of full Council.

95. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meetings held 13 January 2026 as a true and accurate record.

96. Addresses by members of the public

None.

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

None.

98. Debt Recovery Procedure

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 14 October 2025, the Committee requested an update on the council's debt recovery procedure. The Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, the Group Finance Director and the Revenues Service Delivery Manager were present to respond to questions.

The Revenues Service Delivery Manager introduced the report, noting that the Committee had queried the Council's use of enforcement agents, the steps taken to identify and support people experiencing temporary or permanent vulnerabilities, and the routes taken to recover outstanding debt. The report set out this information with explanation of the Council's legal obligations.

Councillor Turner welcomed the Committee's interest in the topic and emphasised the importance that the Council places on supporting people who are financially marginalised or vulnerable. Specific mention was made to the Council's use of grant funding, its commitment to council tax reduction, and the various advice and support services made available to citizens.

Councillor Ottino queried what the Council does to support those on universal credit with council tax payments, and whether any reductions are offered.

The Revenues Service Delivery Manager outlined the Council's use of MARS software to assess council tax for those residents in receipt of universal credit. The Committee heard that this enables better understanding of the impact of payment timings in order to inform recovery action and it considers personal circumstances of vulnerable persons to ensure appropriate support can be offered.

Councillor Turner also emphasised the need to carefully consider how to highlight a person's vulnerabilities to the Council to ensure they can receive appropriate support. Reference was made to the complexity of legal wording required in debt recovery communications and the Council's work with a behavioural psychologist to encourage better engagement.

Councillor Taylor and Councillor Qayyum joined the meeting during discussion of this item.

Councillor Ottino also queried how often the Council meets with relevant advice centres, to which Councillor Turner noted the Council's openness and officer attendance at advice centre AGMs. The Committee heard of capacity issues within advice centres which has limited the frequency of these meetings.

The Revenues Service Delivery Manager further explained that the Council used to hold quarterly meetings with advice centres, however capacity issues and volunteer availability has reduced these.

Councillor Turner left the meeting during discussion of this item.

Councillor Qayyum queried the accessibility of the complaints process for vulnerable residents and asked how the Council approaches and manages language barriers and digital exclusion during the debt recovery process.

Councillor Miles asked what steps the Council takes to confirm the identity of a person believed to be residing at a given property when enacting debt recovery measures.

Councillor Jarvis, in relation to paragraph 7 of the report, queried what incentives enforcement agents may perceive to be available, and whether they are required to report any new vulnerabilities of citizens to the Council. Councillor Jarvis also asked how frequently debt recovery cases are referred to an enforcement agency.

In response to Councillor Miles, the Revenues Service Delivery Manager explained the legislative requirements which the council are subject to when serving documents to a person's last known address; the process for this was outlined in detail. In response to Councillor Jarvis, the Revenues Service Delivery Manager noted that the Council meets with its contracted enforcement agencies on

a quarterly basis and pursues a vigorous process of aligning recovery to the council's policies, therefore expectations are placed on the companies to report vulnerabilities. In relation to possible incentives of bailiffs, their fees are covered by legislation and therefore no percentage of incentive is available to recover on the debts collected. The Committee also heard that if dissatisfied with the agency, the Council can assign work to their other provider. In response to Councillor Qayyum, it was noted that each enforcement agent wears body worn cameras which enables complaints to be assessed with evidence; around 1250 complaints are received monthly and are dealt with via the Council's complaints mechanism.

In regards language provisions during enforcement and debt recovery processes, and the frequency of debt recovery cases being referred to enforcement agencies, the Revenues Service Delivery Manager committed to reporting back. The Committee also heard of some of the more informal and plain language methods of communication used to contact residents including text messages, alongside formal legal correspondence.

Councillor Stares queried how confident the Council is that necessary and appropriate communication occurs with residents before enforcement takes place.

Councillor Rowley asked whether the Council receives any communications regarding debt recovery from the public that may have been generated via AI tools and is not accurate; what steps are taken to respond appropriately.

The Chair firstly requested a summary of the timeline between first contact and enforcement action taking place and then queried whether there is scope to add plain language wording as a supplement to the written communications sent to residents to ensure ease of understanding for all recipients.

The Revenues Service Delivery Manager provided a comprehensive step-by-step overview of the stages to the debt recovery process from first contact to completion of debt collection or payment. In response to Councillor Rowley, it was noted that any correspondence from residents would be responded to with a justification of why an amount is due to be paid and legislation would be used to support this reasoning.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider possible recommendations.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:

- That a summary report on council debt recovery activities at all stages is provided to Scrutiny and Cabinet at a future meeting to ensure there is awareness in this area of the council's work.

- That Cabinet considers incorporating clear, plain language summary within letters issued to individuals in addition to links to further information online, given the prevalence of digital exclusion and unfamiliarity with local government terminology. This would reduce reliance on residents needing to follow online links to understand the purpose and implications of the letters.
- That the timescales of meetings with advice centres is revisited to ensure they correspond to their capacity and availability, noting that critical role of advice centres as both a key contact point for residents and a source of specialist advice and support.

The Chair thanked the officers.

The Group Finance Director and the Revenues Service Delivery Manager left the meeting.

99. Noticeboards Update

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 9 September 2025, the Committee requested an update on the Council owned noticeboards. The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies, the Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens, and the Director of Communities and Citizens' Services were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Chapman introduced the update report by noting its connection to the Citizen Engagement Strategy. The Committee heard that the report takes a practical approach to assessing the variable maintenance situations and uses of noticeboards across the city and suggests how they can be used most effectively in the future. The Committee were asked to consider the proposals within the report.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens reiterated that the report reflects a mixed picture across city and contained options for the Committee to consider.

Councillor Miles noted her thanks for the report and expressed a preference for valuable work with noticeboards to be maintained within the city. On this basis, it was asked what the procurement procedure and funding sources would be, and whether this could be standardised. Councillor Miles suggested that the Committee could consider the allocation of free space on noticeboards to allow residents to post their own leaflets, without the control the relevant organising body. Finally, it was asked how new locations for more noticeboards could be identified.

Councillor Taylor queried whether the Council had considered engaging with shops and small businesses to put noticeboards within their premises.

Councillor Chapman recommended that the most efficient provider for noticeboards is ODS, and the Committee heard of his experience with the installation and costs of this. It was noted that this could provide consistency across the city, as suggested by Councillor Miles. Councillor Chapman suggested that ODS be used in place of multiple varied suppliers. In respect of key control, Councillor Chapman noted strengths and weaknesses to centralised control of noticeboards and recommended that the Committee consider this.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens Services clarified that the noticeboard costings included within the report were on the basis of ODS undertaking the work.

Councillor Qayyum expressed her view that the Council should be involved in the provision and management of noticeboards around the city.

Councillor Ottino queried what permissions are needed to put up a new noticeboard and requested that relevant guidelines for councillors be made available.

Councillor Chapman and the Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens explained that formal planning permission is not usually required, but in some instances, the permission of the landowner may be necessary; this should be assessed on a case-by-case basis.

Councillor Miles noted concern and her experience with planning permission disputes relating to noticeboards and requested that councillors be provided with some definitive guidance.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens suggested that the Committee may wish to make this as a recommendation, with consideration for the budget review group report later in the meeting.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider possible recommendations.

The Committee resolved to add to the recommendations of the Budget Review Group:

- To proceed with Option 3 (Continue with noticeboards, with City Council actively managing and operating the boards) as the preferred approach for the management and maintenance of community noticeboards costed at £75,000 one-off capital investment for the resurvey, installation, replacement or repair of noticeboards, and an annual budget of £35k for ongoing management and maintenance. In implementing this, existing arrangements led by parish councils or neighbourhood association should not be discouraged

nor discontinued. Should Option 3 not be achievable due to budgetary constraints, it is recommended that no further action is taken (Option 1).

Further to this, the Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:

- Subject to the agreement that the Council will commit to actively managing and operating the noticeboards as proposed in the budget review process, that clear guidelines are developed for the use of noticeboards, including how new items and updates are managed, and the responsibilities of key holders.

The Chair thanked the officers.

100.AI Strategy Update

At the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 1 July 2025, the Committee requested a review of the Council's AI Strategy. The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies, the Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens, the Director of Communities and Citizens' Services, and the People Programme Manager were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Chapman introduced the report, noting that the strategy supplements the Council's existing AI policy. The Committee understood that the report outlined how the progression of AI use would be managed in the future with reference to clear principles and a governance framework. Councillor Chapman emphasised the challenges of AI as it rapidly evolves and the need to keep it continuously under review, but also the exciting opportunities it offers, including for current apprentices within the council and for wider organisational efficiency. The Committee were informed that these apprenticeships are being funded via a government levy. Councillor Chapman concluded by urging the Committee not to be too prescriptive in any recommendations put forward as to allow the productive development of AI with time.

The Director of Communities and Citizens' Services emphasised that the strategy seeks to curate a safe introduction for AI mechanisms within the organisation and to maintain a fair balance between safety and responsibility alongside creativity. The Committee learned of the steering groups which have been developed to assess and monitor the Council's expansion of AI.

Councillor Miles suggested an open question focused on whether security and GDPR had been considered within the Council's expansion of AI.

Councillor Corais queried the savings targets mentioned in the report, specifically how they had been set up and managed.

The Director of Communities and Citizens' Services, in response to Councillor Miles, emphasised that the Council manages AI within a highly secure environment, and the current policy ensures employees use tools that are confined within the Microsoft environment. This ensures that all organisational data remains within a compliant boundary and risk is naturally minimised; data and audit trails are also maintained. The Committee were assured that this is assessed by the steering groups which ensures compliance with necessary protocols. In response to Councillor Corais, the Director of Communities and Citizens' Services explained that no specific target has been set in relation to AI, instead the report references savings in relation to an existing target for transformation programmes. The Committee heard future assessments would determine whether efficiency savings could be made using AI.

The Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens also noted that the Council would assess future savings from AI and referenced some local authorities already doing so. It was emphasised that the savings would focus on how staff use AI tools, not the replacement of staff with AI.

The Chair noted that the strategy references making decisions about when ethical AI can be deployed and asked whether there is a process for making these decisions. Specifically, it was asked what areas AI may be allowed into, and what parameters this would be based on.

The People Programme Manager emphasised that the process is still being tested and refined through the steering group. In reference to Microsoft CoPilot, the Committee heard that monitoring is currently focused on how officers are using the tool to create and engage with AI agents and the protection and management of sensitive data within this. The People Programme Manager outlined other steering groups which also exist to monitor the application of AI in specific departments, and the process which these projects must complete before reaching the Organisation Change Board, chaired by the Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens.

Councillor Qayyum asked whether CoPilot would be the only AI tool taken forward by the Council, or whether others are also being considered.

The People Programme Manager noted that all current trials within the organisation only use CoPilot. The Committee were assured that procurement guidelines are being reviewed to facilitate the rollout of other AI tools which considers factors such as environmental sustainability credentials.

The Chair asked whether there is a reporting process for AI related incidents, and whether examples of inaccurate or negative outcomes are recorded.

The People Programme Manager confirmed that relevant training is being developed and delivered to all staff on how to use AI tools safely, and some staff are asked to fill out logs to record learning and disadvantages. This allows issues to be reviewed.

Councillor Miles asked what the Council's approach to transcriptions through AI is, and how third-party tools can be managed from an operational perspective.

The People Programme Manager clarified that the question related more to the AI policy than strategy but summarised that transcription is permitted in line with consent guidance which applies to meeting attendees where AI is used; human checking still occurs even when AI transcription has been utilised. In relation to third-party add-ons, the Committee heard that a process is being developed with the IT team to stop this until authorisation has been confirmed by the organisation.

Councillor Taylor asked how the use of AI generated content on the Council's public website, for example, would be managed and viewed by the organisation.

Councillor Chapman emphasised that officers would remain responsible for any content they published using AI, and human checking would still be required to ensure organisational and individual accountability remains.

The Chair, in conversation with officers, confirmed there are currently no AI situations within the Council where there is no human responsible for checking output.

The Committee made no recommendations to Cabinet.

The Chair thanked the officers.

The Cabinet Member for Citizen Focussed Services and Council Companies, the Deputy Chief Executive for City and Citizens, and the Director of Communities and Citizens' Services left the meeting.

101. Budget Review Group Report

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor had 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 its meeting on 10 June 2025 and approval of the Terms of Reference and Scope at its meeting on 9 September 2025.

The Chair reminded the Committee to indicate if they wished to discuss the confidential appendix to the report for this item; they did not.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor summarised the report, noting that the Budget Review Group had met through December and January to examine the Council's proposed budget and medium-term financial plan. The Committee were informed that nine recommendations were produced, as detailed in the report.

Councillor Jarvis expressed his thanks to members of other working groups which had participated in the discussions and noted that the group had fewer recommendations than previous years, partially due to the nature of the financial plan and expected changes with Local Government Reorganisation. Councillor Jarvis also thanked Councillor Fry as the Chair of the budget review group, and the Group Finance Director.

The Chair noted that the Committee's earlier recommendation relating to noticeboards would be formally appended to this report.

Councillor Miles noted her thanks and support for the recommendations but suggested that all those who had contributed the budget review group discussion be referenced within the report in the future. Councillor Jarvis supported this and requested that the report be amended to reflect this acknowledgement. There being no dissent, the Committee supported this amendment.

Councillor Taylor expressed his discontent with recommendation 4.

The Chair explained that detailed reasoning for the recommendation could not be provided during this meeting as relevant officers were not present to respond.

Councillor Jarvis, as a member of the budget review group, noted that recommendation 4 had been discussed repeatedly in earlier years, and noted that it broadly held cross-party support. Councillor Jarvis recommended that the Committee endorse all the recommendations within the report.

The Committee resolved to:

1. **Endorse** the report and recommendations from the Budget Review Group, subject to the amendments set out above.
- **Delegate** authority to the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, to make minor amendments to the report.

102. Scrutiny Work Plan

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor summarised the work plan and asked the Committee to consider whether they would be minded to consider the report on CIL and ward member budgets delegations expected at March Cabinet to answer any questions relating to ward member spend.

The Committee welcomed this.

The Chair invited additional suggestions from the Committee.

Based on existing issues within Oxford, Councillor Ottino suggested that a report on the City Council's role in highways management be brought forward, with a focus on powers and lessons learned.

Councillor Taylor suggested that the report scrutinise how ODS deliver this work as the responsible body.

The Chair welcomed this and suggested that the report also consider walkways as well as roads.

Councillor Miles suggested that the report be framed around commissioning and payment channels.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor committed to taking away the suggestions and discussing the feasibility of the suggestions with relevant officers.

The Chair emphasised the importance of the topic with consideration of Local Government Reorganisation and the potential responsibilities that a new unitary authority could take on for highways management.

The Committee **noted** the workplan.

103. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

The Chair informed the Committee of Cabinet's responses to their recent recommendations, as set out in the report. Regarding the Local Plan, the Committee understood that Council had considered a recommendation relating to the creation of new local centres but not taken it forward.

Then Committee discussed the decision taken at Council and requested that the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor obtain additional guidance from relevant officers to support Members' understanding of why some recommendations were not taken forward.

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

104. Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

There were no recommendations to endorse.

105. Dates of future meetings

The Chair invited the Committee to consider an adaptation to the timing of the next meeting to accommodate Members observing Ramadan. The Committee agreed that the next meeting would begin at 18.15.

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

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.00 pm

Chair
2026

Date: Tuesday 10 March

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

To: Cabinet
Date: 18 March 2026
Report of: Director of Communities and Citizens Services
Title of Report: Leisure Contract Annual Service Plan (2026-27) and Year 2 (2025-26) Update

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update Cabinet on the highlights of the second year of the new leisure contract and approve the Annual Service Plan 2026-27, which is an annual requirement of the operator, aiming to align outcomes to the Council's priorities and to address health inequalities.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford
Corporate Priority:	Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Thriving Communities Strategy

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet resolves to:
1. Approve the Leisure Annual Service Plan 2026-27 and delegate authority to the Director of Communities and Citizens Services in consultation with the Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford, to make any necessary amendments.

Information Exempt From Publication
N/A – no exempt documents

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Oxford Annual Service Plan 2026-27	No
Appendix 2	Active Communities Plan	No

Appendix 3	Oxford Leisure Upgrades (Photos)	No
Appendix 4	Risk Register	No
Appendix 5	Equalities Impact Assessment	No

Introduction and background

1. The Cabinet agreed on 24 January 2024 to receive annual reports on the performance of leisure services and the contractor and agree the business plan priorities for the following year.
2. The Council appointed its new leisure contractor Serco Leisure Operating Limited on 27 March 2024, and provision officially started on 30 March 2024. More Leisure Community Trust acts as Serco's delivery partner, responsible for day-to-day operational management and community engagement, while Serco retains contractual accountability.
3. This report provides an update on the second year of the contract and an overview of the Annual Service Plan for Year 3 (2026-27).
4. The Annual Service Plan will be reviewed in monthly client meetings and the quarterly meetings of the Strategic Partnership Board which includes officers from the Council and More Leisure's senior management teams, and key partners such as Active Oxfordshire, Public Health, Integrated Care Board (ICB), alongside user representation.

Second year performance

5. A summary of the second year's performance of the leisure contract is highlighted below. Please note that, due to reporting deadlines, the data covers only nine months (April to December 2025).
6. Targets set last year (largely 3% increases) have all been exceeded. Headline figures include:
 - a. 377,974 recorded visits (compared to 280,311 visits in the previous year)
 - b. 13,169 pay as you go members (compared to 12,803 visits in the previous year)
 - c. 5,257 total members, of which 801 are concessionary members (compared to 4,611 and 678 members in the previous year)
 - d. 2,332 swimming lesson members (compared to 2,268 in the previous year)
 - e. 333 membership referrals for people experiencing homelessness and supported by the Council's commissioned homeless pathway services (compared to 162 in the previous year)
 - f. An average Net Promoter Score customer experience rating of -11 (compared to -44, where the service ended under the previous operator); disruption from leisure investment works such as the Leys Youth Hub may have contributed to the low score and we expect this to improve in the year ahead (also note the leisure sector's average Net Promoter Score stands at 22 – source: [Moving Communities, 2025](#))

7. As of January 2026, £36,000 of in-kind funding has been allocated, supporting a number of activities such as:
 - a. Barton Utd FC half term club swim sessions (75 children)
 - b. 250 free soft play sessions (vouchers distributed to local partners)
 - c. Youth Ambition activities including ice skating and swimming (funding for 250 children and young people)
 - d. South Oxford Family Triathlon at Hinksey Pool (an inclusive, untimed and non-competitive event for families to enjoy together)
 - e. Enabling pulmonary rehab courses at Leys
 - f. Activity sessions and classes for members of My Life My Choice (self-advocacy organisation for people with learning disabilities)
8. The Council's leisure centres have continued their period of significant transformation and are continuing to improve. Key investments and achievements over the last year include:
 - a. Partnership working and community development by More Leisure's Active Communities Manager, who has been working with communities to improve accessibility of the leisure centres and develop new programmes to reach a wider audience (see more in Appendix 1)
 - b. Opening of the new Leys Youth Hub, which is providing positive activities for young people including a climbing wall, music room, cooking, group activity areas and quiet space; 184 individual young people have engaged to date
 - c. Continuation of the Council's [under 17s free swimming programme](#), which currently offers 37 hours of free swim sessions across its pools, at no cost to the Council (16,135 free swims were enjoyed in April to Dec 2025, compared to 9,737 in the same period in 2024)
 - d. Continuation of the Council's excellent [concessionary scheme](#), which offers low cost pay as you go and monthly membership to residents on low incomes
 - e. Full refurbishment of changing facilities at Ferry Leisure Centre (with Barton and Leys to follow in Spring 2026)
 - f. New active zone at Leys Pools and Leisure Centre (soft play and tag arena)
 - g. A commitment to healthier food in our facilities, with a vending trial commencing from February 2026 (working in partnership with Public Health)
 - h. Fairtrade, organic, Rainforest Alliance-certified and Soil Association-accredited tea and coffee are now served at all sites; 30p discount for bringing a reusable cup
9. A summary slide deck that highlights some of these key achievements and photos is available in Appendix 3.
10. We maintain strong oversight of health and safety through monthly client reporting, contract meetings, and regular compliance checks; any urgent concerns are immediately raised by the operator. In April to December 2025, 3.15 accidents were recorded per 10k visits (compared to 3.82 in the same period in 2024).

11. One incident to note was a pool rescue at Barton Leisure Centre in November 2025, after which the individual was taken to hospital and sadly passed away a few days later. While the fatality did not arise from an incident within the leisure centre or as a result of any shortcomings, we have undertaken further assurance checks with the operator, alongside our regular compliance monitoring, to confirm that all required safety processes and controls remain robust.
12. The Council's relationship with More Leisure continues to be a positive one, with good communication and regular formal meetings to track progress. The operator is flexible and keen to work in partnership with the Council.
13. Formal complaints received and handled by the Council directly relating to our leisure operator have reduced from 30 in 2024/25 to 14 in the period April to December 2025. The complaints handled primarily relate to issues at Ferry Leisure Centre that are now resolved or actively being addressed (service disruptions and inconsistent service delivery).
14. For the year ahead the Council will look to build on this relationship, work to complete the remaining investment works and continue to work together to improve how repairs and maintenance are managed.

Annual Service Plan

15. The Annual Service Plan ("ASP") (Appendix 1) outlines the priorities and actions to enhance leisure services in Oxford, including key capital investments. It focuses on improving health and wellbeing across target groups including children, young people, women, people with disabilities, and older adults.
16. The ASP aligns with key Council strategies such as the Thriving Communities Strategy and wider ones such as Oxfordshire County Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, Sport England's Uniting the Movement and the NHS Fit for the Future: 10 Year Health Plan for England.
17. The ASP cross-references More Leisure's Active Communities Plan (Appendix 2) and includes initiatives for physical activity, mental health support and community engagement, aiming to create inclusive and accessible leisure opportunities for all Oxford residents.
18. Focus areas are derived from national physical activity priorities, which are then translated into Oxford-specific actions to tackle local health inequalities. This ensures that our local priority groups and interventions dovetail naturally with the overarching national framework.
19. Some of the key themes from the Active Communities Plan are outlined below:
20. Embedding national programmes across the contract
21. The plan sets out a series of national initiatives that Oxford's leisure contract is expected to deliver consistently across all sites. These programmes collectively strengthen quality, safety, inclusion and wellbeing. This suite of national programmes showcases a clear organisational commitment to standardised, evidence-based and socially inclusive leisure provision, with a particular emphasis on safety, early years support, and addressing gender imbalances in activity participation. Highlights include:
 - a. Leisure to Active Wellbeing – moving away from a traditional leisure approach to more preventative and integrated services strongly aligned to

reducing health inequalities. We will continue work with Sport England and the leisure operator to maximise opportunities in this area.

- b. Early years programme – the “Baby Welcome” policy is already embedded, signalling an established commitment to improving experiences and support for families with infants.
- c. Water Wellbeing – accreditation has been secured, and teams have been trained in motivational interviewing and behaviour-change techniques to better support local residents with health needs.
- d. UK Active Safer Spaces – training to reinforce the safety and inclusiveness of leisure environments.
- e. Warm Welcome Hubs – provision promoted throughout winter, contributing to wider social-support networks for vulnerable residents.
- f. Lift the Curfew – supporting the safety and independence of women and girls in accessing physical activity spaces.

22. Tackling local health inequalities through targeted priority groups

23. A broad spectrum of local priority groups have been identified, directly reflecting the JSNA, NHS and City Council strategic priorities. The breadth of priorities demonstrates a strong focus on reducing health inequalities, particularly in communities experiencing deprivation.

24. The plan highlights the intention to direct services where need is greatest, using insight from Community Health Insight Profiles to guide this work. This positions leisure as a mechanism for addressing systemic inequalities in health, wellbeing and access. Local priority themes include, but are not limited to:

- a. Residents with long-term health conditions
- b. People with mental health needs
- c. Women and girls, addressing gender-specific barriers (including female-only swimming sessions)
- d. Disabled people, including SEN and neurodivergent residents
- e. Refugees and asylum seekers
- f. Children and young people
- g. Multicultural communities

25. Strengthening and expanding health and community partnerships

26. Across the identified focus areas, the Active Communities Plan outlines a wide network of partnerships that the leisure contract will work with, and complement, to deliver improved health and social outcomes.

27. The plan envisages a connected ecosystem of health and community partners, embedding leisure within wider clinical pathways, neighbourhood wellbeing systems, and youth support networks. This reflects an ambition to ensure leisure services act not only as activity providers, but as integral contributors to health improvement, social care prevention and youth development. Partners include:

- a. The NHS, ICB and GP surgeries (including social prescribers and pathways such as Move Together and You Move)

- b. Local charities and local organisations
- c. Local and national disability and sports organisations
- d. Leys Youth Hub

28. Supporting community safety and positive pathways for young people

29. Within the priority area for Children and Young People, the plan highlights a preventative community-safety dimension. The clear linkage between physical activity, positive engagement and reduced antisocial behaviour gives a strong narrative about the dual social and health benefits of an active leisure partnership.

30. The focus for this includes increasing opportunities for children and young people living in areas of deprivation and contributing to the decrease of anti-social behaviour and crime by creating constructive, accessible activity pathways.

31. Targeted key focus areas for the year ahead

32. Three core focus areas for development during 2026 are identified:

- a. Long-term health conditions
- b. Disabilities
- c. Children and young people

33. Across each focus area, three common threads emerge:

- a. Targeting deprived areas identified in the community insight profile.
- b. Building strong partnership frameworks tailored to each priority group.
- c. Expanding opportunities, whether through new sessions, supported pathways or improved accessibility.

34. The clarity and consistency across these areas show a strategic, insight-led approach, ensuring that next year's priorities are coherent, intelligence-driven and rooted in community-level evidence.

Financial implications

35. The Council receives monthly finance reports as part of the Client monitoring report pack, which is reviewed and any questions communicated to Serco for response. BDO are also conducting a review of the contract. All management fee payments in accordance with the contract, up to and including December 2025, have been received.

Legal issues

36. The Annual Service Report is a contractual reporting mechanism through which Serco formally accounts to the Council for its performance under the contract and sets out proposed priorities and actions for the forthcoming year. The report is required to be submitted annually and must contain the information required as set out in the contract.

37. The Council must review the Annual Service Report to ensure that it is satisfied with the information provided, that the report accords with the contractual requirements.

38. Subject to the Council being satisfied with the contents of the Annual Service Report, there are no additional legal issues or implications arising. Should any aspect of the Annual Service Report require clarification or give rise to potential

legal, contractual, or governance concerns, further legal advice should be sought as appropriate.

Level of risk

39. The level of risk is low. A Risk Register is shown in Appendix 4.

Equalities impact

40. The Equalities Impact Assessment is shown in Appendix 5. The Annual Service Plan incorporates equalities at its core and there are no implications arising from this.

Carbon and environmental considerations

41. Not required, as for key decisions only.

Report author	Hagan Lewisman
Job title	Active Communities Manager
Service area or department	Communities and Citizen Services
Telephone	01865 252706
e-mail	Hlewisman@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:
None

This page is intentionally left blank

Oxford Leisure Annual Service Plan April 2026 to March 2027 (Year 3)

An introduction to More Leisure and our Oxford partnership

More Leisure Community Trust is a solutions organisation whose vision is:

To inspire all individuals to engage in activity and to be at the heart of improving health and wellbeing in the community.

And our mission:

Working with strategic partners to promote active and healthy lifestyles for all, in a safe, warm, clean, friendly and fun environment.

Our partnership with Oxford City Council

We started our 10 year (plus 5 year option to extend) partnership with Oxford City Council in March 2024. Our values align with key Council strategies such as the Thriving Communities Strategy, Health and Wellbeing Strategy and wider ones such as Oxfordshire County Council's Health and Wellbeing Strategy, and Sport England's Uniting the Movement. Our National Active Wellbeing Strategy supports community development and integration with the health sector, recognising the need for strong partnership working and pivoting from a traditional leisure model to active wellbeing.

Health inequalities in Oxford

Oxford City faces notable health inequalities, with life expectancy varying significantly across different areas. Men in the most deprived areas live up to 13 years less than those in the least deprived areas, while women face a gap of around 9 years. Four of Oxford's neighbourhoods are in the top 20% most deprived neighbourhoods in England (IoD, 2025). After housing costs, 28.4% of Oxford's children live in poverty (DWP, 2022-23).

Data gathered by Local Community Health Insight Profiles suggests that people living in Oxford's deprived communities experience higher rates of child and fuel poverty, unemployment, and disability, which contribute to poorer health outcomes than the

England average. Notable issues include elevated emergency hospital admissions, preventable mortality, obesity (especially among children), diabetes, and mental health challenges such as anxiety and loneliness. Barriers to healthy living – like limited access to affordable healthy food, costly sport and leisure activities, transport difficulties, and lack of childcare – further exacerbate these inequalities.

Our partnership plays a crucial role in addressing these inequalities, supporting residents to lead healthy lifestyles and connecting with the health and voluntary sectors. In alignment with the NHS 10-year plan, we aim to strengthen collaboration and prioritise their focus on the transition from hospital to community care. We will also be looking to work closely with the Council and Sport England on the emerging grassroots and facilities external funding stream to look at how we can continue to move from leisure to active wellbeing.

Achievements and highlights from last year (Year 2, 2025/26)

Some of the key achievements and highlights from the second year of the contract include:

Barton

- Pool inflatable
- Lift replacement
- Assisted lifeguard technology implementation

Ferry

- Changing room refurbishment wetside
- Changing room refurbishment dryside
- Indoor cycle studio
- Air handling unit (ventilation system) replacement x3
- Squash court refurbishment x2
- Dryside & wetside inflatables
- Assisted lifeguard technology implementation
- Replacement fire doors

Leys

- Active zone (soft play and tag active) including brand new café & toilets/party room
- Sports hall redecoration including fire doors/shutters/complete replacement of lights
- Assisted lifeguard technology implementation
- Youth Hub implementation
- Climbing wall
- Reopening of café including redecoration & furniture

Hinksey Pool

- New in-house catering
- New seating
- New tannoy system & security system
- Extensive plant room works continued into new season

Ice Rink

- New in-house catering
- Brand new dehumidification units
- Redecoration of meeting rooms
- New rack system for skates
- New locker system
- Ice pit grit replacement

Key active communities highlights from 2025

- MECC training for front of house staff

Active Communities Manager completed training in October 2025. Will deliver training in early 2026 to coincide with Exercise on Referral Scheme

- Exercise referral pathway (including social prescribing)

Links created with social prescribers and GP medical centres in general. Exercise on Referral scheme to be launched in 2026 and be part of the Move Together Pathway.

- Launch of Leys Youth Hub

Official launch party was 17th September 2025

- Increased participation of all demographics

Partnership working across all sectors of the community, utilising the community fund to work with groups including:

- Disability/ SEN/ Neurodivergence
 - Mental Health
 - Low Socioeconomic families
 - Multicultural
 - Refugees and asylum seekers
 - Women and girls
 - Youth aged 11 to 21
 - Over 50's
 - Those experiencing homelessness
-
- An Increase in early years, parents/carers and young people engagement
 - Increase in active zone opportunities, that are diverse and inclusive
 - Swimming opportunities for young people and their families
 - SEN specific sessions across the contract
-
- An Increase in women and girls' provision
 - Female specific sessions partnered with Dancin' Oxford – the offering is a low impact creative dance movements (imagine seated exercise but more creative) and a young people's creative dance session.
 - Let's Lift the Curfew – free guided walks for females from Leys Leisure Centre
-
- Implementation of a wellbeing programme of activities across all sites
 - Wellbeing ice skating session – we have a wellbeing skate session once a week, which aims to support those that are lonely, have mental health issues and want to increase their social network. It is open to anyone.
 - Chatty café – this is a national initiative that supports people to engage socially using our facilities. We have a chatty café at the Ice Rink as part of the mums and toddlers session, plus a drop in coffee and chat after the wellbeing session.
-
- An Increase multi-cultural communities' engagement

- Partnership work with groups such as Syrcox, Oxford Community Action (OCA) and Name it Youth to increase opportunities.
- 22x leisure membership for asylum seekers and refugees.
- An Increase in specific activities and initiatives for those with a long term health condition, neurological disorder, disability and neurodivergence
- Special Educational Needs (SEN) or disability specific sessions in all centres
- Physical activity programme delivered alongside NHS education and support schemes
- Pulmonary rehab course
- Concessions for You Move/Move Together participants - programmes that help families facing barriers and inactive adults (including those with health conditions) access free or low-cost activities and personalised support to get active, improve wellbeing, and enjoy moving more together.
- You Move fees aligned with Bonus concessionary prices (293 members as of Nov 2025)
- Move Together patients to be introduced to Exercise on Referral pathway in 2026

Key deliverables for this year 2026/27 – capital works and active communities

Capital works

Leisure facility	Capital work to be undertaken	Programme completion
Barton Leisure Centre	Wet & dry changing room refurbishment	May 2026
All sites	Continuous redecoration plan	Ongoing
Leys Pools & Leisure Centre	Dry changing refurbishment	March 2026

Wellbeing Strategy National Priorities

The Wellbeing Strategy National Priorities will focus on 9 key areas, developing programmes and initiatives within More Leisure Centres. These include the following,

which will be delivered alongside the key local priorities outlined within the Annual Service Plan:

- Early Years established programme
- Baby Welcome policy embedded
- Water Wellbeing - Accreditation achieved
- Teams trained in MI / Behaviour Change
- UK Active Safer Spaces Training
- "Women Who Lift" gym floor programme
- Warm Welcome Hubs - promoted throughout winter
- Lift the Curfew
- Health Campaigns embedded & promoted

Local Priorities

- The Active Communities Annual Delivery Plan 2026 for Oxford (Appendix 2) will focus on the priority areas listed below; these complement Oxford City Council's priorities and the Community Health Insight Profiles

Key priority areas

1. Long Term Health Conditions
2. Children and young people
3. Physical inactivity
4. Disabilities
5. Mental health

Active Communities Manager to:

- Engage with local community groups to increase participation and utilise the community fund
- Attend quarterly reviews on local engagement with the Active Communities National Lead
- Liaise with Oxford City Council to ensure the plan is delivered effectively to key priority demographics

Partner Engagement

- Continued partnership work with local and National organisations to deliver activities
- Create links with new local organisations to develop opportunities within the priority areas
- Enhance opportunities through You Move and Move Together pathways

Key performance indicators

Measures taken and updated from the leisure contract. Please note that, due to reporting deadlines, figures for Year 2 represent 9 months of data (April to December 2025).

Measure	Baseline (Year 1, 2024/25)	Target This Year (Year 2, 2025/26)	Actual (Apr to Dec 2025)	Target Next Year (Year 3, 2026/27)
Total members	4,716	4,857	5,032	5,085 (+3%)
Total participation	289,081 (revised)	297,753	377,974	389,313 (+3%)
Participation of users with disabilities	1,068	1,100	1,675	1,725 (+3%)
Age breakdown (where data is known):				
- Under 18s	U18s: 11,955	U18s: 12,314	U18s: 20,302	20,911 (+3%)
- Adults (18 to 64)	18-64: 128,585	18-64: 132,443	18-64: 135,573	139,640 (+3%)
- 65+	65+: 39,070	65+: 40,242	65+: 28,290	29,139 (+3%)
	NB: baseline has been updated based on revised reporting			

Strategic Objectives

Measures taken and updated from the leisure contract. Please note that, due to reporting deadlines, figures for Year 2 represent 9 months of data (April to December 2025).

No	Description	Baseline (Year 1, 2024/25)	Target This Year (Year 2, 2025/26)	Actual (Apr to Dec 2025)	Target Next Year (Year 3, 2026/27)
1.	Reduce the number of children leaving primary school from 4 to 2 who can swim 25 metres	4 out of 10	2 out of 10	3 out of 10* *Data from 17 schools who responded to Active Oxfordshire's 2025 survey	2 out of 10
2.	Increase the number of young people taking part in activities at Leys Youth Hub (NB this is a measure directly controlled by Youth Ambition)	No baseline as Youth Hub was not open in 2024/25	N/A	184 individuals	250 individuals
3.	Increase satisfaction levels within the leisure centres (Net Promoter Score)	-44 (NB this was as of March 2024, under the previous operator)	-10	-11	0
4.	Achieve Quest accreditation	Leys: Good NB: no Quest assessments took place in Year 1 at other sites so baselines unavailable for those	Excellent at all sites	Awaiting results of assessments	Excellent at all sites
5.	Contribute to the Council's commitment to zero carbon in Oxford	No existing Environmental standard 14001:2015 accreditation.	To be achieve next year	To be achieve next year	Achieve Environmental standard 14001:2015 accreditation.
6.	Providing wider social value through strong positive engagement with partners	Social value: 0.8% of income for in-kind community fund	At least £30k allocated	£36k allocated as of Dec 2025	At least £38k allocated by Dec 2026

Risks

In order to manage risk please refer to the Business Continuity Plan (Appendix 1).

Active Wellbeing

Priorities within Leisure

These are the priorities which have been identified across a number of Local Authorities - local priorities will identify a number of these based on local need.

35

Priority	Notes	Statistic / information
Children aged 0-11	To ensure that children have the best start in life, with good habits being developed from a young age. Frequently identified are low levels of activity and obesity.	There are currently seven million children aged five to 15 in England and more than half are not doing the recommended daily amount of exercise. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Children and young people aged 12-19	To ensure that children and young people maintain/develop good habits from a young age and into adulthood. Frequently identified are low levels of activity and obesity.	In our November 2019-20 Active Lives Adult report we saw the activity levels of 16-34-year-olds decrease - with a sharper decrease more evident in the 16-24 age group. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Older people	To help people age in good health, reducing the level of support needed by external organisations.	As you get older, you're far more likely to become inactive. Our research shows that 42 per cent of people aged 55 and over are inactive compared to 29 per cent of the adult population. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Women and girls	In many areas, women and girls have reduced participation in physical activities - often with a variety of barriers. Activities specifically targetted to these groups help females access activities improving	39% of women aged 16 and over are not active enough to get the full health benefits of sport and physical activity, compared to 35% of men. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Multicultural communities	In many areas, people from multicultural communities have reduced participation in physical activities - often with a variety of barriers. By engaging with these communities and p This group often has cross-over with the women and girls category with many women from multicultural	Analysis from our latest Active Lives Adult Survey shows that Mixed and White Other adults continue to have the highest activity levels, while South Asian, Black and those with other ethnic origins are the least likely to be active. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Disabilities and long term conditions	Physical activity can have many benefits for people with disabilities or long term conditions e.g. easing / improving symptoms, preventing symptoms getting worse, improving general health, improved mental health associated with their condition, improving self-confidence and	We know that people with a long-term health condition, and disabled people are twice as likely to be physically inactive than those without a disability or health condition. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Low socio-economic communities	People in low socio-economic groups are less likely to participate in organised physical activity due to barriers related to cost. Ensuring there are opportunities to access activities will help improve wellbeing within this priority group. On a local level there are typically identified areas/wards.	It found that people in lower socio-economic groups (LSEGs) are the most likely to be inactive (33%) and the least likely to be active (54%). And with nearly a third of the adult population in England - around 12 million people - in a LSEG, that is a significant number of people who could reap huge benefits from being more active. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Physical health	To ensure all communtites are able to live well and be healthy. This includes weight management, obesity, smoking cesation.	One in four people in England do less than 30 minutes of physical activity a week. But our research also shows that those who do the least activity stand to benefit the most, even if it's just small changes like gentle jogging, swimming or playing rounders in the park. [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Mental health	Mental health has been identified as improving with physical activity. People have become comfortable with discussing mental health and engaging with opportunities to improve their mental health. This has enabled leisure facilities to provide opportunities for people to improve their overall	We published a report in October 2024 that shows there is "strong and consistent evidence that sport and physical activity interventions had positive effects on the diagnosed mental health problems of children and young people". [Sport England website, Nov 25].
Referral schemes	To provide a route for medical professionals to prescribe 'exercise on referral' to those people whose conditions would benefit from physical activity.	People who do regular physical activity have a lower risk of: coronary heart disease and stroke, type 2 diabetes, bowel cancer, breast cancer in women, early death, osteoarthritis, hip fracture, falls (among older adults), depression, dementia, including Alzheimer's disease. [NHS website, Nov 25].
Those in care, care leavers and carers	Those in care and care leavers are likely to have reduced access to physcial activity - access can help improve care leavers self-confidence. Carers are often time poor leading to reduced physical	
All (other) inequalities	Other communities/groups who experience inequalities which may/may not impact them accessing physical activities. The aim is to include the whole community and for members of that community to feel comfortable and welcome at the leisure centres. These communtities include, but are not exclusively LGBTQ+, veterans, specfic localities, inclusion groups such as those experiencing	Our research show that people who state they have no religion are more likely to be physically active compared to those that belong to a faith group.

	Starting Well	Starting & Growing Well	Growing Well	Growing & Living Well	Growing & Living Well	Living Well	Living Well	Living & Aging Well	Living & Aging Well	All	All	All	All	Other notes captured throughout	Ambitions for 2026
	Early Years Sessions	Children (aged 5-11)	Young People (aged 12-18)	Carers, those in care & care leavers	Women & Girls	Behaviour Change Support for healthy lifestyles (e.g. activity, obesity, smoking, substance misuse)	People with disabilities & SEN Sessions	GP Referral & Cardiac Referral	Older people (Inc. Veterans)	Multicultural Communities	Low SE Groups	Mental Health	Other		
37 Core contract delivery	Adult and toddler swim sessions. Active zone soft play at the Leys. Parent and toddler group at ice rink.	Swim school. Looking to do kids camps, Tag X, soft play, under 17s free swimming	Tag X and junior gym.	Looking to offer membership for children in Foster Care with Council. Offer Bonus membership for people who are carers.	Lift the Curfew, Women's only swimming at the Leys,	GLP-1 Pathway	Disability swims. Quiet Hours. SEN Soft Play, SEN Swimming at Hinksey. SEN & Disability Ice Skating session. British Ice Skating support the Disability session and want to do more.	Type 2 Diabetes will be a referral pathway into GP ref. About to launch GP referral, Barton and their Leys.	E-Gym at Leys & Ferry, 50+ Badminton, Good Boost in Barton. Planning to introduce Forever Fit programme of activities. 50+ Swimming.	Muslim Prayers Friday evening at the Leys. Church sessions on a Sunday in a studio. African Families of United Kingdom. Skating and swimming with Syrian refugee and Sycrox & OCA is a Muslim families organisation. Memberships offered to Refugee's	You Move Partnership with council. Children on free school meals are entitled to discounted membership rates and now under 5's. Homeless Pathway Scheme, entitled to 6months free membership for anyone referred on Homeless pathway, work done with Refugees placed in hotels.	Wellbeing Ice Skating & Social session at the Ice Rink, linked with the chatty café. Oxfordshire MIND send people to these sessions.	Community Fund in partnership with the council. Whatever profits Serco make 0.8% go into a community fund. This targets under represented groups they can apply for small grants, facility hire, swimming, memberships, soft play and Gym. Lots of additional one off activities as well e.g. over half term. Community fund funds this. Up to £1k also ask		Looking to get kids camps up and running. Have a children's community coordinator active zone, parties, and kids camps. would like to replicate this across other centres. Lots of gymnastics kit in Ferry. Get the P referral up and running. Also to have some condition specific groups, cancer, post surgery etc. Neuro pathway, falls prevention.

Partners delivering	Mums & babies class.	Dance club, Tw Kondo, Swim club, Footstall, Blackbirds FC football club.	Youth Ambition football and basketball and do sessions in Youth Hub. Similar as young groups. Embed football and cricket academy. Youth Ambition CIC - Looking to use		Women only football groups on 3G. Empowered sisters dance group through community fund will become a regular session. 70+ ladies hire studio to run own yoga session		Disability school provision use pool for swim session. "Keen" disability group hire facilities to do multi sports sessions. Home Education group hire facilities	Cardiac Rehab external provider. Parkinsons group looking to come back to centre.	Age UK looking to hire again to so a social session in the café and activity session in sports hall. Walking Football with Oxford United.			Dad's V Dads - blokes football session.			
---------------------	----------------------	--	---	--	--	--	--	---	---	--	--	---	--	--	--

Active Wellbeing

Annual Delivery Plan 2026 - Oxford

National Initiatives

Initiative	Notes	RAG
Early Years established programme		
Baby Welcome policy embedded		
Water Wellbeing - Accreditation achieved		
Teams trained in MI / Behaviour Change		
UK Active Safer Spaces Training		
"Women Who Lift" gym floor programme		
Warm Welcome Hubs - promoted throughout winter		
Lift the Curfew		
Health Campaigns embedded & promoted		

National Initiatives: These are a number of bigger pieces of work that we will look embed across all contracts. More may be added to list as year

39

Local Priorities

As identified in key strategic documents locally (e.g. JSNA, ICS, NHS priorities, Local Authority Plans)

	2026 focus area?
Long Term Health Conditions	Yes
Mental Health	Yes
Women and Girls	
Disabilities	Yes
Refugees and Asylum Seekers	
Low Socio-economic Disadvantaged People	
Children and Young People	Yes
Over 50's	
Under 5's	
Multicultural Communities	

Local Priorities: These have been taken from your local JSNA, LA Plans and NHS health data. Please add any additional priorities in here your client has specifically asked we work on.

Focus Areas: For 2026 we are asking you to pick 3 key priority areas you are looking to develop across your contract. Use your "Gap Analysis" picture including the priority areas to help guide your choices.

Local Priorities - Chosen areas of focus for 2026

Long Term Health Conditions

Specific details or areas we would like to address?	Focus on areas of deprivation highlighted within the community insight profile.
Who are the local partners will we look to work with?	NHS, surgeries, social prescribers, client representatives, ICB, local charities, Age UK
Anything else?	Launch the Exercise on Referral Scheme and link with Move Together Pathway

Disabilities	
Specific details or areas we would like to address?	Focus on areas of deprivation highlighted within the community insight profile. Increase opportunities with a network of disability, SEN and neurodivergent sessions
Who are the local partners will we look to work with?	Local charities and national and local sports specific organisations
Anything else?	Link to Move Together and You Move Pathways

Children and Young People	
Specific details or areas we would like to address?	Increase opportunities for people in areas of deprivation, with a focus on contributing to the decrease of anti social behaviour and crime
Who are the local partners will we look to work with?	NHS, CAMHS, social prescribers, client representatives, local charities and organisations, Leys Youth Hub,
Anything else?	Ages 0 to 5 early years and 6 to 18

Other	
Specific details or areas we would like to address?	Mental Health
Who are the local partners will we look to work with?	You Move, Move Together, local charities and NHS
Anything else?	

Oxford Leisure Upgrades

Highlights from 2025-26

Appendix 3 to 18th March 2026 Cabinet Report

Barton Leisure Centre

- Pool inflatable
- Lift replacement
- Assisted lifeguard technology

Barton Leisure Centre

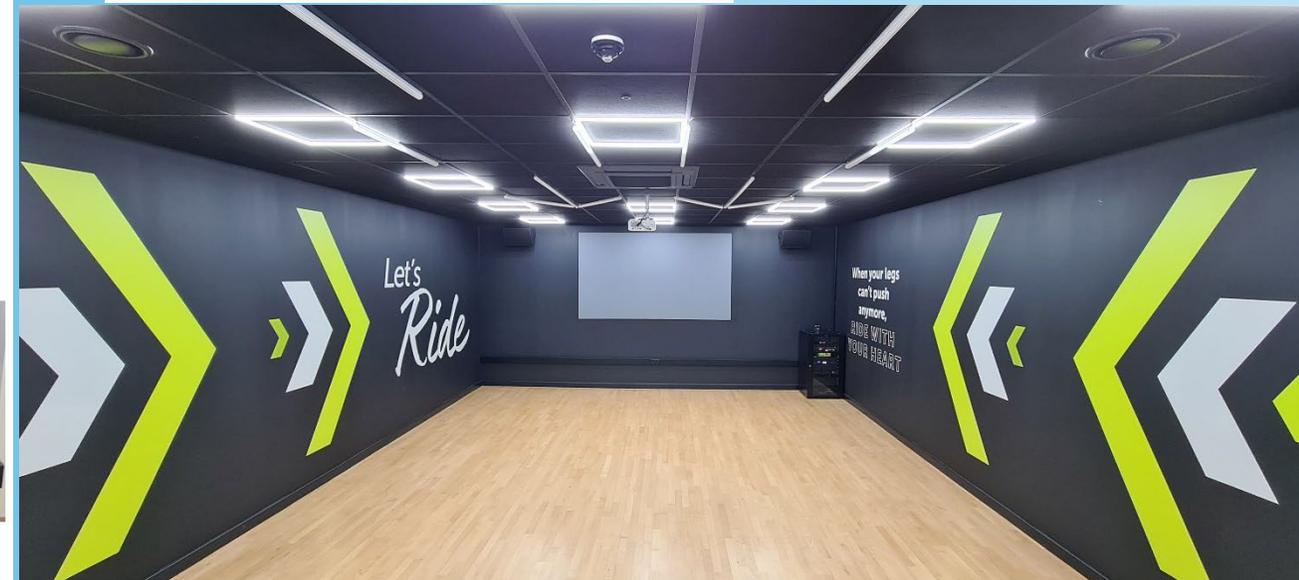
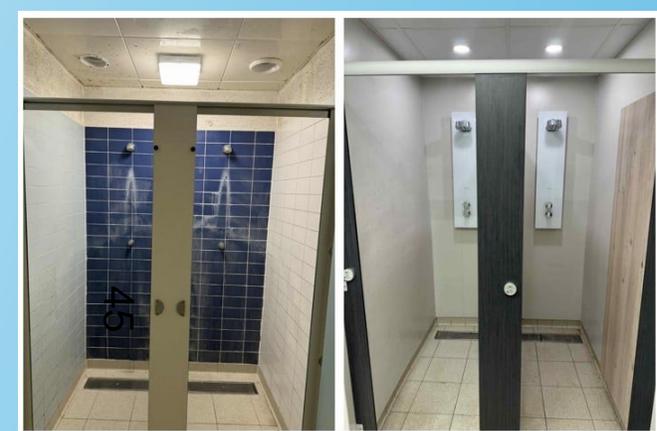
43



Ferry Leisure Centre

- Changing room refurbishment wetside
- Changing room refurbishment dryside
- Indoor cycle studio
- 44 • Air handling unit (ventilation system) replacement x3
- Squash court refurbishment x2
- Dryside & wetside inflatables
- Assisted lifeguard technology
- Replacement fire doors

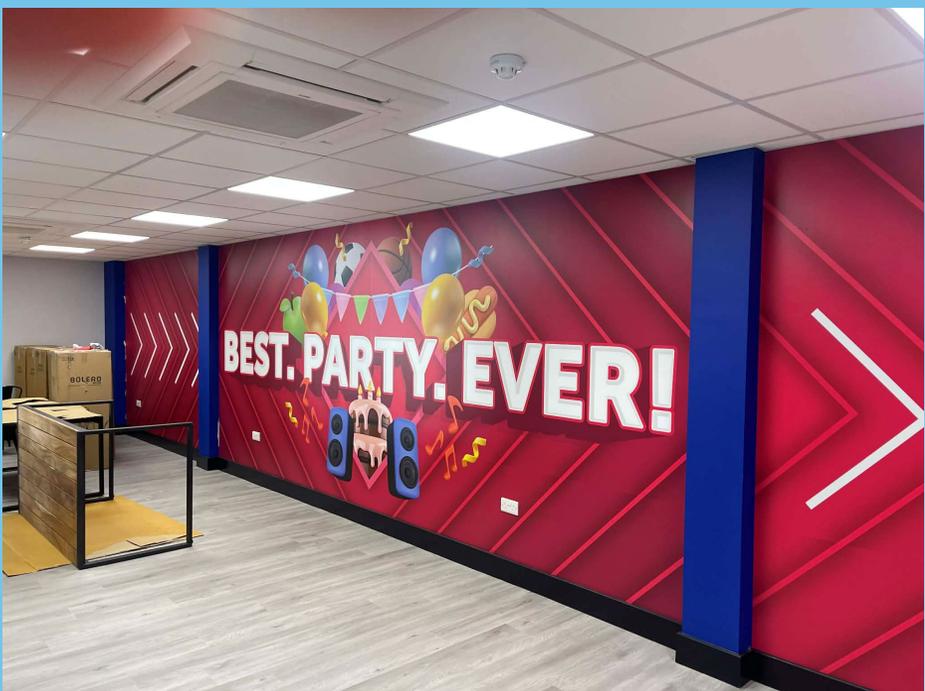
Ferry Leisure Centre



Leys Pools and Leisure Centre

- Active zone (soft play and tag active) including brand new café and toilets/party room
- Sports hall redecoration including fire doors/shutters/complete replacement of lights
- Assisted lifeguard technology implementation
- Leys Youth Hub
- Climbing wall
- Reopening of café including redecoration and furniture

Leys Pools and Leisure Centre



Hinksey Outdoor Pool

- New in-house catering
- New seating
- New tannoy and security systems
- Extensive plant room works continued into new season

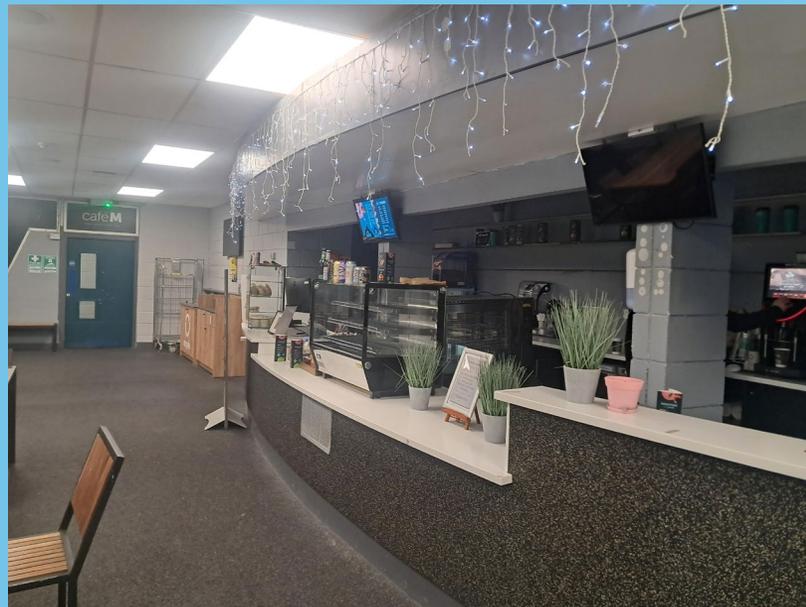
Hinksey Outdoor Pool



Oxford Ice Rink

- New in-house catering
- Brand new dehumidification units
- Redecoration of meeting rooms
- New rack system for skates
- New locker system
- Ice pit grit replacement

Oxford Ice Rink



This page is intentionally left blank

Risk Register - Leisure Contract ASP Year 3 (Serco / More Leisure) - updated 12 Jan 2026

Ref	Title	Risk Description	Opp / Threat	Cause	Consequence	Risk Treatment	Date Raised	Owner	Gross			Current			Target			Comments	Control / Mitigation Description	Date Due	Action Status	% Progress	Action Owner
									P	I	Score	P	I	Score	P	I	Score						
1	Deterioration of service	Deterioration of the standard delivered (customer service and maintenance) over the lifetime of the contract e.g. cleanliness	Threat	Provider focuses elsewhere. Turbulence in the external environment.	Reduced level of service for local people and reduced participation; reputational damage	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	1	4	4	1	4	4	1	4	4	-	Ensure that there is a robust contract in place, regular monitoring take places and a strong client team. Quarterly maintenance and monthly client meetings are in place. Programme of regular client audits. Requirement to achieve Quest Excellent by the end of Year 2.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	Hagan Lewisman / James Baughan
2	Financial	The external provider is unable to achieve their business forecasts and asks for a change in contractual arrangements	Threat	External factors such as pandemics, utility pricing or a bid that was unrealistic	Financial impact to OCC and/or service reduction to cut costs that impact service quality	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	3	4	12	3	4	12	2	4	8	Work is being undertaken to understand Serco's reasons behind its lower than expected financial performance, using the client report to challenge and interrogate figures, and mitigations such as increasing fees and charges above inflation have been put forward; ongoing discussions with Serco.	Ensure robust contract in place and strong, well skilled client team. Work with Serco to ensure options are presented to reduce/remove any pressure to the Council. Regular monitoring. Open book accounting. Internal officers meeting.	31/03/26	Ongoing	70%	Emma Burson / Hagan Lewisman / James Baughan
3	Invest to saves	Invest to saves proposals not being accepted, or effectively delivered	Threat	If invest to save proposals are not deliverable either practically or politically; disagreement on terms	Financial impact to assumed management fee	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	1	4	4	1	3	3	1	3	3	Final investment works to complete by Summer 2026.	Delivery programme in place; regular communications with operator; confirmation of no impact to management fee received.	31/03/26	Ongoing	80%	James Baughan
4	Contract management	Robust contract management not being in place for the contract; misalignment of contractual documents	Threat	Lack of resource and prioritisation; old versions of documents in use	Contractor not adhering to contractual obligations; productive relationship not forming with the operator	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	2	4	8	1	4	4	1	4	4	External audit taking place early 2026.	Ensure that adequate time and focus is given to ensuring contractual obligations are fulfilled. Client monitoring arrangements in place (as item 1 above); internal officers group; final contract docs agreed.	31/03/26	Ongoing	80%	Hagan Lewisman / James Baughan
5	Inclusive access	Pricing and concessions are not effective at increasing usage in target groups	Threat	Operator focusses on full paying customers	Leisure centres not playing their role in tackling inequalities; reputational damage	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	3	4	12	2	4	8	1	4	4	Bonus concessions maintained in current round of fees/charges discussions; kept low to minimise risk to most vulnerable customers; ASP includes programmes to widen access.	Concessions have been shaped through dialogue. Changes may need to be made to improve the concessionary offer.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	Hagan Lewisman / James Baughan
6	Partnership	Effective partnership not formed with the new operator	Threat	Poor contract management; ineffective governance; poor communication	Contract does not deliver its target outcomes	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	2	3	6	1	3	3	1	3	3	Strategic Partnership Board due to commence from Feb 2026.	Well-designed governance; good communication, regular meetings and establishing good behaviours with Serco management team.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	Hagan Lewisman
7	Health and safety, and compliance	Issues on sites around health and safety of customers or staff	Threat	Poor systems of health and safety governance	Injuries or fatalities; reputational damage	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	2	5	10	1	4	4	1	4	4	External Right Directions H&S audits scheduled each year.	Client meetings and inspections; external inspections including Quest and Right Directions H&S audits.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	James Baughan
8	Misalignment of Council priorities	Contractor not understanding and aligning with Council's values, contract and priorities; focusing on commercial over active communities (incl mismatch between net zero council 2030 and net zero Oxford 2040 vs Serco's 2050 target)	Threat	Poor working relationship and communications; lack of clear energy / carbon reduction strategy across sites	Contract not delivering active communities outcomes; reputational damage	Reduce	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	4	4	16	2	4	8	2	3	6	Energy management plan received and to be discussed with Serco.	Client meetings and partnership working.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	James Baughan
9	Accessibility	Failure to meet accessibility requirements	Threat	Equipment not being replaced or well maintained; customer information in inadequate format	Reduced participation of customers with accessibility needs; reputational damage	Reduce	12/02/25	Hagan Lewisman	3	5	15	3	4	12	3	4	12	Barton lift replacement completed Oct 2025; Ferry couches replaced end of 2025.	Client and maintenance meetings; stronger emphasis on some R&M items.	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	Jonathan Wright / Hagan Lewisman / James Baughan
10	Local government reorganisation and devolution	Risk to contract as local government is reorganised	Threat	Government policy	Uncertainty on client arrangements or alignment of contract	Accept	02/01/25	Hagan Lewisman	5	3	15	4	3	12	3	3	9	LGR bid submitted Nov 2025, including a contribution from the leisure team	Keep updated with local gov reorganisation plans; contract likely to be transferred to new authority	31/03/27	Ongoing	90%	Justin Zizys / Hagan Lewisman
11	Unknown external factors	Unknown risks such as future pandemics	Threat	Unidentified risks	Unknown	Accept	01/04/24	Hagan Lewisman	3	3	9	3	3	9	3	3	9	-	Business Continuity Plan in place (Serco)	31/03/26	Ongoing	90%	Hagan Lewisman

Risk Identification

Risks should be identified that may affect the Council's ability to achieve its business objectives, execute its strategies successfully or limit its ability to exploit opportunities.

Risks can be identified through a number of methods, including:

- A 'brainstorming' session or workshop with the whole management team and relevant stakeholders
- Interviews or questionnaires with key stakeholders
- Meetings with smaller groups of people

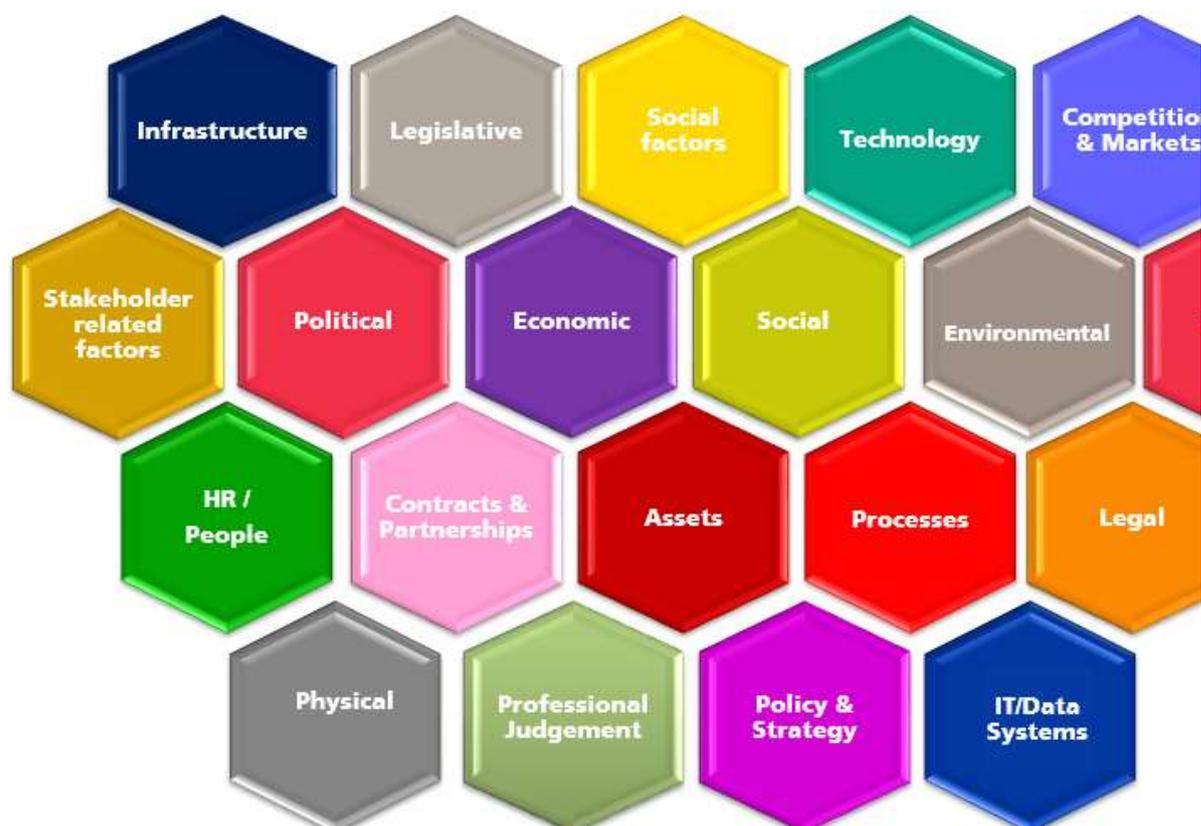
There are a wide range of methods available that can be used to identify and understand risks. The method that you select will depend upon the type of risk(s) that you are dealing with but typically a management team workshop is the method most commonly used.

Additionally, existing sources of information could help inform this stage. Some examples are listed

- Service / corporate plans, strategies and objectives
- Existing risk registers
- Risks or issues raised by internal audit or other scrutiny body
- Risks identified through budget setting processes
- Health & safety risk assessments
- Business continuity risk assessments
- Partnership, programme or project documentation (e.g. business case or project risk register)
- Experience of those participating in the risk identification process

It is the responsibility of those identifying risks to decide which sources of information they should consult. This may be one or more of the sources listed above or it could be something else you think is

As well as direct risks to the achievement of our objectives it is important to think broadly about uncertainties that may have an impact on the organisation. The diagram shown below illustrates a variety of different risk themes, expanding on PESTLE prompts, which the organisation could face.



Once identified, the risks need to be described in sufficient detail and recorded in a consistent format to support effective decision making on the way that the risk is managed. It is crucial for risks to be defined properly at this stage. Failure to do so can result in confusion about the exact nature of the risk, ineffective risk controls being implemented, or the risk analysis being over or underestimated.

The description of the risk should include the following elements:

- Risk Title – a short and concise header for the risk
- Description – expanding on the risk title outlining the situation or event that exposes us to a risk.
- Risk Cause – also known as the trigger event. Situations or factors which result in the risk becoming a reality.
- Risk Effect – the likely consequences if the risk materialises (The negative impact - consider worst likely)

When describing a risk try not to describe the impact of the risk as the risk itself or define risks with statements which are the converse of objectives. Focus upon the uncertain event that would result in



Types of Risk to consider	
Strategic / Commercial	
1	Under performance to specification
2	Management will under perform against expectations
3	Collapse of contractors
4	Insolvency of promoter
5	Failure of suppliers to meet contractual commitments (quality, cost, time)
6	Insufficient capital
7	Market fluctuations
8	Trade/Banking crises
9	Fraud/theft
10	Partnership failing to deliver desired outcomes
11	Situation is not insurable (cost of insurance outweighs the benefit)
Economic / Financial / Market	
1	Exchange rate fluctuation
2	Interest rate instability
3	Inflation
4	Shortage of working capital
5	Failure to meet projected revenue targets
6	Market developments will adversely affect plans
Legal and Regulatory	
1	New or changed legislation may invalidate assumptions upon which the activity is based
2	Failure to obtain appropriate approval e.g. planning consent
3	Unforeseen inclusion of contingent liabilities
4	Loss of intellectual property rights
5	Failure to achieve satisfactory contractual arrangements
6	Unexpected regulatory controls or licencing requirements
7	Changes in tax or tariff structure
Organisational / Management / Human factors	
1	Management incompetence
2	Inadequate corporate policies
3	Inadequate adoption of management practices
4	Poor leadership
5	Key personnel have inadequate authority to fulfil their roles
6	Poor staff selection procedures
7	Lack of clarity over roles and responsibilities
8	Vested interests creating conflict and compromising overall aims
9	Individual or group interests given unwarranted priority
10	Personality clashes
11	Indecision or inappropriate decision making
12	Lack of operational support
13	Inadequate or inaccurate information
14	Health and Safety constraints
Political	
1	Change of government policy
2	Change of government
3	War and disorder
4	Adverse public opinion/media intervention
Environmental	
1	Natural disasters
2	Storms, flooding, tempests
3	Pollution incidents
4	Transport problems (including aircraft/vehicle collisions)

Technical / Operational / Infrastructure	
1	Inadequate design
2	Professional negligence
3	Human error/incompetence
4	Infrastructure failure
5	Operation lifetime lower than expected
6	Increased dismantling/decommissioning costs
7	Safety being compromised
8	Performance failure
9	Residual maintenance problems
10	Scope creep
11	Unclear expectations
12	Breaches in security/information security
13	Lack or inadequacy of business continuity

Risk Evaluation and Prioritisation

Once risks have been identified the risk matrix is the main tool for prioritising risks so we can establish which risks are most significant and therefore are in need of greater attention and resources. It also allows us to compare different types of risk with each other across the council.

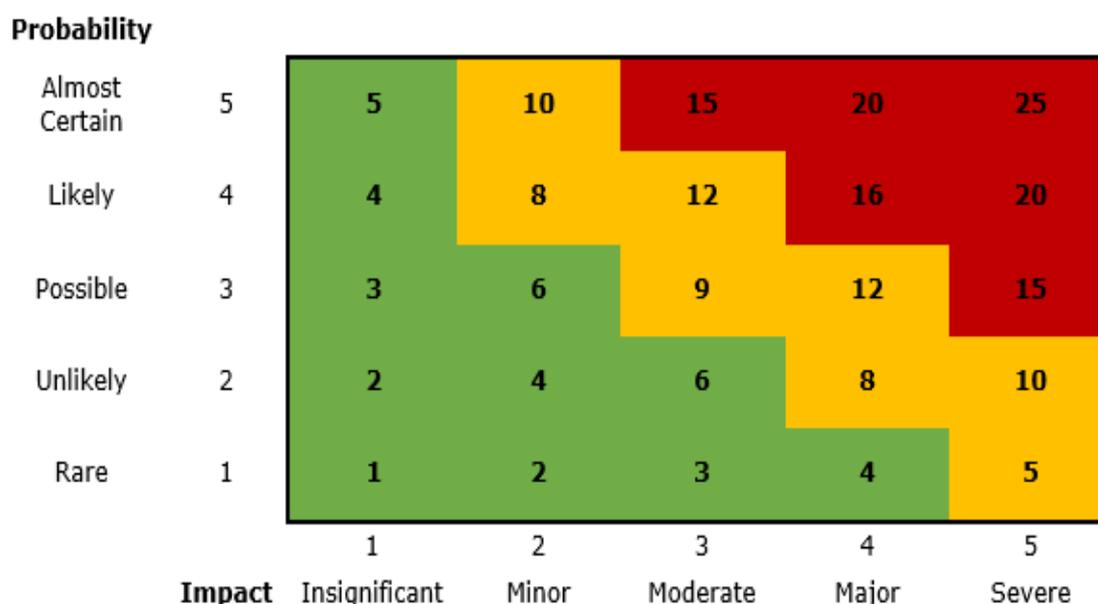
Each risk should be analysed using a five by five matrix for (1) the likelihood it will happen and (2) the impact if it did occur. This assessment should be made on three different basis:

- Gross risk – risk level if existing key controls and mitigations were not in place or not effective.
- Current risk – risk level after existing controls and mitigations are taken into consideration.
- Target risk – anticipated risk level following the introduction of planned controls and mitigations.

Assessing the gross risk allows consideration of the dependency the organisation has upon the existing key controls and informs decisions around risk treatment, and selection of an appropriate target risk level, considered in the next section of this toolkit. It is often helpful to consider the Current Risk first, and then ask yourself what the impact and likelihood of the risk might be if the key controls

It is the risk owner’s responsibility to ensure the controls they believe are reducing the risk are effective and are working in practice. Controls that are not yet in place should not be considered

Each identified risk should then be plotted onto the risk matrix.



When considering the likelihood of a risk happening you should select the number from 1 to 5 from the risk matrix that you think it will be over the next 12 months (it can be longer or shorter; some risks in the Strategic Risk Register are better considered over 3 to 5 years, some operational risks will be considered over 3 to 6 months). This score will require an element of judgement when considering how

- Has this event happened before in the Council? (How frequently?) Has this event happened elsewhere? (How)
- How likely is it that one or more of the causes/ triggers of the event will occur?
- Has anything happened recently that makes the event more or less likely to occur?

The following tables provide some support in quantifying the risk in terms of likelihood and impact.

Risk Probability Assessment Criteria

Scale	Description	Likelihood of Occurrence	Probability of Occurrence
1	Rare	1 in 10 years	The event may occur in certain circumstances

2	Unlikely	1 in 3 years	The event could occur
3	Possible	1 in 2 years	The event should occur
4	Likely	Annually	The event will probably occur
5	Almost certain	Monthly	The event is expected to occur or occurs regularly

When you select the impact you should give consideration to the factors outlined in the risk matrix. For example, if the risk you are scoring has a low financial impact but a high impact on our reputation then you would select the most appropriate number between 1 and 5 that relates to the level of reputational

Risk Impact Assessment Criteria

	Insignificant	Minor	Moderate	Major	Severe
Financial	<£50k per annum	£50k - £250k per annum	£250k - £500k per annum	£500k - £750k per annum	>£750K per annum
Service Delivery	No impact to service quality, limited disruption to operations	Minor impact to service quality, minor service standards are not met, short term disruption to operations, minor impact on a partnerships	Significant fall in service quality, major partnership relationships strained, serious disruption in service standards	Major impact to service quality, multiple service standards are not met, long term disruption to operations, multiple partnerships affected	Catastrophic fall in service quality and key service standards are not met, long term catastrophic interruption to operations, several major partnerships are affected
Reputation	Public concern restricted to local complaints which do not attract local media attention.	Minor adverse local / public / media attention and complaints	Adverse national media public attention	Serious negative national or regional criticism	Prolonged, regional & national condemnation
Compliance & Regulation	Minor breach of internal regulations, not reportable	Minor breach of external regulations, not reportable	Breach of internal regulations leading to disciplinary action Breach of external regulations, reportable	Significant breach of external regulations leading to intervention or sanctions	Major breach leading to suspension or discontinuation of business and services
Strategic	Little impact on the organisational strategy	May have an impact on achieving organisational strategy	Would impact on the organisational objectives	Would require a significant shift from current strategy and objectives	Would require a fundamental change in strategy and objectives

Risk Treatment

Once risks have been identified and scored based on current controls the next step is to decide what action needs to be taken to manage them. Generally speaking, there are four approaches to treating

Action	Description	Options
Treat / Reduce	Controlling the likelihood of the risk occurring, or controlling the impact of the consequences if the risk does occur	Reducing the likelihood of the risk occurring AND / OR Mitigating the impact if the risk does occur
Tolerate / Accept	Acknowledging that the ability to take effective action against some risks may be limited or that the cost of taking action may be disproportionate to the potential benefits gained.	The ability to take effective action against some risks may be limited or the cost of taking action may be disproportionate to the potential benefits gained in which case the risk is accepted on an "informed" basis.
Terminate / Avoid	Not undertaking the activity that is likely to trigger the risk	Changing the direction or strategy and revisiting objectives or improving channels of communication Obtaining further information from external sources or acquiring expertise Reducing the scope of the activity or adopting a familiar, proven approach Deciding not to undertake the activity likely to trigger the risk
Transfer	Handing the risk on elsewhere, either totally or in part – e.g. through insurance.	Financial instruments such as insurance, performance bonds, warranties or guarantee. Renegotiation of contract conditions for the risk to be retained by the other party. Seeking agreement on sharing the risk with the other party. Sub-contracting risk to a consultant or external suppliers. NB. It may not be possible to transfer all aspects of a risk. For example, where there is or reputational damage to the organisation.

When considering further action required to manage the risk, and indeed the appropriateness of existing controls, an assessment of treatment options should be made alongside a consideration of the Council's risk appetite and tolerance for the current level of risk.

A further consideration is the efficiency of risk treatment in relation to the cost effectiveness of the proposed actions to be taken. Firstly the cost of implementation has to be considered (time, manpower, budget, etc.). The impact expected if no action is taken, should be weighed against the cost of action and the reduction of the impact. There should be a direct benefit from the cost

Plans should then be put into place to manage the risk with key milestones identified and clear owners – ensuring that they are 'SMART' – Specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, time bound.

Oxford City Council has focused on the Red, Amber, Green status of risks in determining the risk appetite of the organization. Red risks are considered unacceptable and every effort must be made to

The risk appetite is reviewed periodically or when there are significant changes to the organisation. Changes to the risk appetite level would require a change to strategy and would therefore require

Why do an Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA)?

1. Equalities Impact Assessment (EqIA) is part of Oxford City Council's [Public Sector Equality Duty \(PSED\) \(Equality Act 2010\)](#).

The General PSED enables Oxford City Council to:

- a. **identify and remove discrimination,**
 - b. **identify ways to advance equality of opportunity,**
 - c. **foster good relations.**
2. [An EqIA must be done before making any decision\(s\)](#) that may have an impact on people and/or services that people use and depend on.
 3. [An EqIA form is one of many tools](#) that can simplify and structure your equalities assessment.
 4. We are passionate about equalities, and we highly recommend that [Corporate Management Team \(CMT\) reports and all projects must attach an EqIA](#).

A good EqIA has the following attributes:

1. **Comprehensively considers the [9 protected characteristics](#).**

1. Age	6. Race & Ethnicity
2. Disability	7. Religion or Belief
3. Gender Reassignment	8. Sex
4. Marriage & Civil Partnership	9. Sexual Orientation
5. Pregnancy & Maternity	NEW- Socio-economic inequalities (voluntary adoption)

2. It has **considered equality of treatment** towards service users, residents, employees, partners, council suppliers & contractors, and Council Members
3. Sufficiently considered **potential and real impact** of proposal or policy on service users, residents, employees, partners, council suppliers & contractors, and Council Members.
4. **Systematically recorded and reported** any potential and real impact of your proposal or policy on service users, residents, employees, partners, council suppliers & contractors, and Council Members
5. **Collected, recorded, & reported sufficient information and data** on how your policy or proposal will have an impact.
6. Offers **mitigations or adjustments** if a PSED has been impacted.
7. Provides clear **justifications** for your decisions.
8. It is written in **plain English** with simple short sentence structures.

Section 1: General overview of the activity under consideration

1.	Name of activity being assessed. For example: -New policy, -Review of existing policy, -Changes in service(s), -New project(s), etc.	Leisure Annual Service Plan 2026-27	2.	The implementation date of the activity under consideration:	April 2026 to March 2027
3.	Directorate/Department(s):	Communities and Citizen Services	4.	Service Area(s):	Active Communities
5.	Who is (are) the assessment lead(s): Please provide: -Name -Email address	Hagan Lewisman hlewisman@oxford.gov.uk	6.	Contact details, in case there are queries: Please provide: -Name -Email address	James Baughan jbaughan@oxford.gov.uk
7.	Is this a new or ongoing EqlA?	New Extension to existing EqlA	8.	If this is an extension of a previous EqlA, please indicate where the previous EqlA is located and share the link to the said EqlA.	June 2018 Cabinet report appendix item
9.	Date this EqlA started:	12/01/2026 (date of update)			
10.	Will this EqlA be attached to Corporate Management Team (CMT) reports/updates, which will be published online?	This will be an appendix of the Cabinet report on the subject	11.	Give a date (tentative or otherwise) when this assessment will be taken to the CMT.	March 2026 as part of the Cabinet report process

Section 2: About the activity, change, or policy that is being assessed.

<p>12.</p>	<p>Type of activity being considered:</p> <p>Check the most appropriate.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Budget	<input type="checkbox"/> Decommissioning	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Commissioning	<input type="checkbox"/> Change to an existing activity.	
		<input type="checkbox"/> New Activity	<input type="checkbox"/> Others. Please specify:			
<p>13.</p>	<p>Which priority area(s) <u>within Oxford City Council's Corporate strategy (2024-2028)</u> does this activity fulfil?</p> <p>Please check as needed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Good, affordable homes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Strong, fair economy	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Thriving Communities	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Zero Carbon Oxford	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Well run council
<p>14.</p>	<p>Which priority area(s) within <u>Oxford City Council's Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy (2022)</u> does this activity fulfil?</p> <p>Please check as needed.</p>	<input type="checkbox"/> Responsive services and customer care.	<input type="checkbox"/> Diverse and engaged workforce.	<input type="checkbox"/> Leadership & organisational commitment.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Understanding and working with our communities.	
<p>15.</p>	<p>Outline the aims, objectives, & priorities of the activity being considered.</p>	<p>Aims: improve the leisure offer and address health inequalities, getting more people active, more often</p> <p>Objectives: various including increasing the number of children leaving primary school able to swim a length; linking with the Thriving Communities Strategy outcomes and creating more inclusive/accessible facilities</p> <p>Priorities: delivering the best and most inclusive leisure offer for our citizens</p>				

16.	<p>Please outline the consequences of not implementing this activity. For example, -Existing activity does not fulfill Corporate Objectives, -existing activity is discriminatory and not fulfilling Council's PSED, ... to name a few.</p>	<p>Participation levels will fall; inactivity may increase; health inequalities may worsen. The City Council will not be able to fulfil its key corporate priorities.</p>

Section 3: Understanding service users, residents, staff and any other impacted parties.

17.	<p>Have you undertaken any consultations in the form of surveys, interviews, and/or focus groups?</p> <p>Please provide details— -when, -how many, and -the approach taken.</p>	<p>Customer feedback surveys, Net Promoter Score (NPS) measurement, informal feedback from users, community groups and other partners.</p>
18.	<p>List information and data used to understand who your residents or staff are and how they will be impacted.</p> <p>These could be- -third-party research, -census data,</p>	<p>Data used to inform our work includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Census • Oxfordshire Joint Strategic Needs Assessment (JSNA) • District Councils' Network Fit for the Future report • Community Health Insight Profiles • Usage data from leisure facilities • English Indices of Deprivation (IoD, 2025)

	-legislation, -articles, -reports, -briefs.	
19.	<p>If you have not done any consultations or collected data & information, are you planning to do so in the future?</p> <p>Please list the details – -when, -with whom, and -how long will you collect the relevant data.</p>	N/A

Section 4: Impact analysis.

20.	Who does the activity impact?	Service Users	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>
	Check as needed. The impact may be positive, negative or unknown.	Members of staff	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>
		General public	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>
		Partner / Community Organisation	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>
		City Councillors	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>
			Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No <input type="checkbox"/>	Don't Know <input type="checkbox"/>

21.

Does the activity impact positively or negatively on any protected characteristics as stated within Equality (Act 2010)?

Check as needed and provide evidence-driven conclusions.

Good Practice is to keep it simple and list your, evidence, insights, and mitigations.

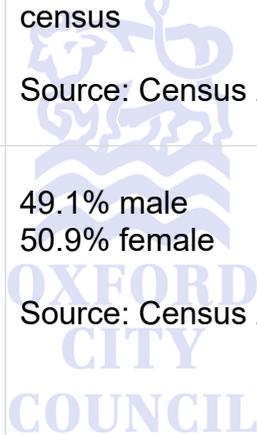
Protected Characteristic	Positive	Negative	Neutral	Don't know	Data/information supporting your assessment	Analysis, insight & mitigations
Age 70	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	25k under 15s (16% of population) 19k over 65s (18% of population) Source: Census 2021	Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces. Mitigations and considerations: Some age groups will benefit from a considered approach to using simple standardised relatable language and signage.
Disability (Visible and invisible)	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	15% living with disabilities Source: Census 2021	Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.

						<p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals with visual impairment and who are neurodiverse will benefit from a considered approach to using simple standardised relatable language in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Gender re-assignment</p> <p>71</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Insufficient data</p> <p>www.oxford.gov.uk</p> 	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using gender inclusive language that is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Marriage & Civil Partnership</p>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>28% married or in civil partnership.</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> People (new and ongoing users of the leisure centres) who identify with this protected characteristic will not be disproportionately impacted negatively or positively.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is</p>

						standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.
72	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>54% White British 17% White-non-British 15% Asian 6% Mixed 5% Black 4% Other ethnic group</p> <p>NB: figures total 101% due to rounding</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication. These actions include not using the BAME acronym in literature. Using more diverse and relatable images and colours in spaces and communications.</p>
	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>1,374 live births in Oxford in 2021</p> <p>Source: Oxfordshire JSNA 2023</p>	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>

<p>73</p> <p>Religion or Belief</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>39% no religion 38% Christian 9% Muslim 2% Hindu 1% Buddhist 1% Jewish 0.5% Sikh 1% other</p> <p>NB: figures do not add up to 100% because they do not include those who did not reply to the religion question in the census</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p>Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people from all faiths/beliefs and none.</p> <p>Mitigations and considerations: Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Sex</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>49.1% male 50.9% female</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p>Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p>Mitigations and considerations: Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Sexual Orientation</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>80% straight/heterosexual 7% not straight/heterosexual</p>	<p>Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this</p>

www.oxford.gov.uk



					<p>NB: figures do not add up to 100% because they do not include those who did not reply to this question in the census</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p>group; some targeted programs will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Socio-economic inequalities such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - income and factors that impact income. -access to jobs <p>This was voluntarily adopted by Oxford City Council on the 13th of March 2024.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Four of Oxford's neighbourhood areas are among the 20% most deprived areas in England. These areas, which are in the Leys, Rose Hill and Littlemore, experience multiple levels of deprivation – low skills, low incomes and relatively high levels of crime.</p> <p>Source: English Indices of Deprivation (IoD, 2025)</p>	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group, especially with the strong concessionary scheme in place ('Bonus'); some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p><u>Mitigations and considerations:</u> Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Other (voluntary consideration)</p> <p>For example:</p> <p>Migrant, refugee, or asylum seekers.</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>35% of Oxford's population was born outside the UK</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>	<p><u>Impact(s) identified:</u> An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p>

						<p>Mitigations and considerations: Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>
<p>Other For example: - Unpaid carers - Prison population - Homeless population - Council suppliers & contractors - Cabinet Members</p> <p>75</p>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<p>Oxford's high cost of living and other factors result in homelessness.</p> <p>Source: Census 2021</p>  <p>www.oxford.gov.uk</p>	<p>Impact(s) identified: An improved, more accessible, and inclusive leisure offer will be attractive to people in this group; some targeted programmes will aim to welcome those who are not using these spaces.</p> <p>Mitigations and considerations: Individuals in this group will benefit from a considered approach to using inclusive language which is standardised in literature, signage, and other forms of communication.</p>

Section 5: Conclusion(s) of your Full Impact Assessment

22.	Conclusions. Check as needed.							
	<input type="checkbox"/>	Stop and reconsider the activity.	<input type="checkbox"/>	Adjust activity before beginning the activity and continue to monitor.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	No major change(s) or adjustments and continue with activity but continue to monitor.	<input type="checkbox"/>	No major change(s) or adjustments and continue with the activity. No need to monitor in the future.
23.	Please explain how you have reached your conclusions above.		<p>The leisure operator will continue to transform the City's leisure offer and create better, more welcoming facilities that attract people from all backgrounds. As programmes are developed and changed, and as the staffing establishment expands, it is recommended to review this EqIA as required, to ensure people are not negatively impacted.</p>					

www.oxfordcitycouncil.uk



Section 6: Monitoring and review plan.

The responsibility for maintaining a monitoring arrangement of the EqlA action plan lies with the service/team completing the EqlA. These arrangements must be built into the performance management framework such as KPIs or Risk Registers.

24.	<p>Who or which team or service area will be responsible for monitoring equalities impact?</p> <p>For example- - team, -directorate, -service area, -Equalities Steering Group,etc.</p>	James Baughan			
25.	<p>Who (individual, team, or service area) will be responsible for carrying out the EqlA review?</p>	James Baughan			
26.	<p>How often will the equality impact be reviewed for this activity?</p> <p>For example- -quarterly, -yearly, etc.</p>	Yearly		<p>27. Date when the EqlA will be reviewed again.</p>	January 2027

Section 7: Sign-off

Name: **Hagan Lewisman**

Job Title: **Active Communities
Manager**

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Name: Full Name

Job Title: Type here

Signature:

Suggested list of people to include are:

- 1) Project lead/manager.
- 2) Head of service area or team.
- 3) Person who completed the EqlA.
- 4) EDI Lead.
- 5) EDI Specialist.
- 6) For joint projects, please consider the following:
 1. Other project leads
 2. Other service area and/or team lead/managers.

This is not an exhaustive list.

78



www.oxford.gov.uk

You have now reached the end of the assessment.

⚠ Please appended this to any reports and project files for reference.



Night time economy
working group
Scrutiny presentation
due 2 March

Why it was set up

The City Centre Action Plan identifies:

Encouraging Overnight Visitor Stays

Objective: Increase the number of overnight stays

Public Realm and Animation

Objective: Enhance public spaces to make them more inviting during the evening.

Getting the Mix Right

Objective: Diversify the range of activities and services available in the city centre.

Getting the Basics Right

Objective: Ensure safety and cleanliness in the city centre during all hours.

The Oxford Economic Strategy: recognises the economic importance of the night time economy: “Promote and facilitate more overnight visitor stays, increasing their enjoyment of our city, while maximising the contribution to the local economy”.



Who is on it

- Live Music Tsar
- City Centre Manager
- Manager from Events Team
- Community safety team
- Economic Development
- Licensing team manager



People stats!

162,000 population – adults 141,027

Adult age spread

18-29: 48,630 (30%)

30-64: 64,840 (40%)

65+: 19,452 (12%)

75+: 8,105 (5%)

One night time venue needed for every 835 people on average in UK.*

169 venues needed for Oxford.

*ONS statistic



City centre audit - within reasonable walking distance

Consider all leisure offer, restaurants, bars, GLAM, theatres, pubs, night clubs - excludes street vendors and fast food takeaways.

Peak time - 8pm

Post 11pm

On Fridays and Saturdays



So what do we have in the city centre, Jericho and Cowley Road

A surprisingly significant
number of night time venues

8pm: 244 venues open (excl fast food
takeaways)

incl 25 venues hosting live music.

11pm: 88 venues open (excl fast food)

incl 19 with regular live music, DJs or open
mic nights.



What can we do to help?

- Promotion with a suite of materials – students, visitors and residents
- Develop policies that support and encourage night time activity.
- Increase outdoor dining, retail and family friendly activation
- Advocate for good public facilities.
- Advocate for public transport
- Annual late night events
- Delivery of lighting strategy - COMPF
- Easy, fast and simple processes for business
- Establish a Live Music Taskforce to ensure that Oxford creates a thriving live music sector into the future.
- Make it easier for live music, cinema and other forms of temporary programming in public spaces and parks
- Evening-oriented activation of under utilised spaces in the city



Next steps

- Plan promotion suite of materials
- Engage with event promoters e.g. Daily Info
- AI to collate live event data
- Agree the actions in priority order

88



OXFORD AT NIGHT



SOPHISTICATED NIGHTLIFE

Elegant cocktail and wine bars for a refined evening.

CLASSICAL CONCERTS

Enjoy an evening of orchestral music at one of the city's renowned venues

FINE DINING

Indulge in gourmet' cuisine at Oxford's premier restaurants

EVENING ACTIVITEES

Theatre shows, historic pubs and comedy nights

Any
questions



Scrutiny Work Plan

March 2026 to June 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	Debt Recovery Procedure
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	AI Strategy
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	Noticeboards Update
Scrutiny Committee	3 February 2026	Budget Review Group Report

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	25 February	Heat Network Update

Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	2026	
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	Social Housing EPC C Update

Housing and Homelessness Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	26 February 2026	Allocations Scheme Review
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	26 February 2026	Measures to meet growing demand for Temporary Accommodation

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	Quarterly Integrated Performance Report - Q3 2025/26
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 March 2026	OCHL Business Plan
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	25 March 2026	OCHL Updates on Development Sites

Housing and Homelessness Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Housing and Homelessness Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	31 March 2026	Housing Performance

Climate and Environment Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Climate and Environment Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	1 April 2026	Local Area Energy Planning Update
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	Shared Prosperity Fund and Green Skills

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
Scrutiny Committee	7 April 2026	WMB and CIL report

Finance and Performance Working Group

Committee/Working Group	Meeting date	Reports
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	14 April 2026	Impacts of the congestion charge
Finance and Performance Working Group (of the Scrutiny Committee)	14 April 2026	ODS Business Plan

This page is intentionally left blank

To: Cabinet
Date: 11 February 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

Appendix 3	Relating to financial sensitivity/business of the Council
-------------------	---

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Report of the Budget Review Group	No
Appendix 2	Budget Review Group Recommendations	No
Appendix 3	Written response to questions from the Budget Review Group	Yes

Overview and Summary

- The Scrutiny Committee met on 3 February 2026 and reviewed the following items:
 - Debt Recovery Procedure

- Noticeboards Update
 - AI Strategy
 - Budget Review Group Report
2. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants 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 11 February 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. In light of discussions relating to the effective use and management of noticeboards, the Committee had made a recommendation to proceed with Option 3 of the options presented by officers as potential way forward. Given there are cost implications to this recommendation, the Committee resolved to include it as an addition to the Budget Review Group Report for consideration as part of the budget review process.

Budget Review Group

6. The Budget Review Group held five meetings in December 2025 and January 2026 to examine the draft budget proposals, as approved by Cabinet for consultation in December 2025. The Group's findings and recommendations are appended to this report which have been endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026.
7. In consultation with the relevant Officers, the budget recommendations (Appendix 2) were forwarded to Cabinet Members to either agree, agree in-part, or disagree. Together with the report, it will be formally considered by Cabinet on 11 February 2026 and then presented to Full Council on 23 February 2026.
8. The Budget Review Group is grateful to all officers, working group members and cabinet members who have all contributed to the process, responding to questions in advance and attending the evening meetings.

Acknowledgements

9. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting held on 3 February 2026 can be viewed [here](#).
10. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the Cabinet particularly Cllr Nigel Chapman (Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies) and Cllr Ed Turner (Deputy Leader (Statutory) – Finance and Asset Management) for their collaborative engagement with Scrutiny. The Committee was also grateful to Nigel Kennedy (Group Finance Director), Phil McGaskill (Revenues Service Delivery Manager), Tom Hook (Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens), Helen Bishop (Director of Communities and Citizens Services) and Becky Willis (People Programme Manager) for their work on the reports presented and responding to questions raised by members.

Financial implications

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

Legal issues

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

Level of risk

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

Equalities impact

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

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

19. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
20. 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 –
Debt Recovery Procedure**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026 concerning the Debt Recovery Procedure. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That a summary report on council debt recovery activities at all stages is provided to Scrutiny and Cabinet at a future meeting to ensure there is awareness in this area of the council's work.	Yes	A complete summary report of debt recovery stages will be presented at the next available scrutiny meeting; here is a breakdown of the current number of accounts in recovery and the stage.

Recovery Stage	Jan 2026
No - Reminder 1 - RM1	2333
<i>value</i>	£1,451,097.12
<i>No - Reminder 2 - RM2</i>	593
<i>value</i>	£275,657.81
<i>No - Reminder 3 - RM3</i>	31
<i>value</i>	£9,949.99
<i>No - Final - FIN</i>	5989
<i>value</i>	£5,293,928.37
<i>No - Summons - SUM</i>	470
<i>value</i>	£427,840.92
<i>No - Liability Order - LO</i>	1004
<i>value</i>	£1,043,312.30
<i>No - Arrangement - ARG</i>	705
<i>value</i>	£457,762.94
<i>No - Attachment of Benefits - AOB</i>	669
<i>value</i>	£330,238.48
<i>No - Attachment of Earnings - AOE</i>	249
<i>value</i>	£204,631.57
<i>No - Enforcement Agents - BLF</i>	4226
<i>value</i>	£4,116,804.41
<i>No - Charging Order - CHO</i>	117
<i>value</i>	£127,559.20
<i>No - Charging Order Application - CA</i>	42
<i>value</i>	£59,383.39
<i>No - Submitted for Write Off - SWO</i>	82
<i>value</i>	£38,169.62
<i>No - Information Request - INF</i>	69
<i>value</i>	£40,499.84
<i>No - Attachment of Benefits Pending - ABP</i>	358
<i>value</i>	£200,612.39
<i>No - Attachment of Earnings Pending - AEP</i>	235
<i>value</i>	£164,173.88
<i>No - Cases with Senior Officer - CWS</i>	90
<i>value</i>	£109,328.74
<i>No - Cases with Court Officer - PRL</i>	228
<i>value</i>	£359,763.47
<i>No - Cases referred for Legal Proceedings - RTL</i>	28
<i>value</i>	£22,027.44

It is important to note that we have no cases at committal stage.

<p>2) That Cabinet considers incorporating clear, plain language summary within letters issued to individuals in addition to links to further information online, given the prevalence of digital exclusion and unfamiliarity with local government terminology. This would reduce reliance on residents needing to follow online links to understand the purpose and implications of the letters.</p>	<p>In part</p>	<p>Billing and Recovery Documents Local Taxation</p> <p>Every element of our billing and recovery documentation, including SMS messaging, has been developed using evidence based behavioural insights provided by Dr Amy Jones, a behavioural scientist and recognised expert in local taxation communications. In designing these materials, careful consideration was given to the strict legislative requirements governing the content of local taxation documents, ensuring that all mandatory information remained fully compliant.</p> <p>While further amendments through supplementary inserts is possible, Dr Jones emphasised the importance of keeping all key information within the main billing and recovery documents themselves. She advised that, wherever possible, the most important messages should be presented prominently on the front page to maximise clarity, comprehension, and customer engagement. We think this is in line with the spirit of the scrutiny recommendation.</p> <p>We have included a link which makes clear her thoughts and our response to how our document should be presented:</p> <p>The Insights of Dr Jones</p> <p>Members also asked for information on translation services in considering this matter so it is provided below:</p> <p>Availability of Translation and Interpreting Services</p> <p>Oxford City Council offers a full range of translation and interpreting services through its provider Word360. These services include telephone interpreting, face-to-face interpreting (including British Sign Language), video interpreting and document translation.</p>
--	----------------	---

Residents can access these services by contacting the Council's main switchboard on 01865 249811 or by visiting the Customer Service Centre, where staff can arrange the required language support.

In addition to English, the recovery team is multi-cultural, with the following languages also spoken:

Punjabi, Hindi, Urdu and Gujarati

Translation Services in the Oxford City Complaints Process

These translation and interpreting services are available to support residents when making a complaint. The services are intended to ensure that all residents can communicate effectively with the Council and access services regardless of language barriers.

Translation Services Provided by Enforcement Agents Engaged by the City Council

XL Enforcement

Offer a range of in house language support through their multilingual team.

In addition to this internal capability, the organisation can produce written communications in over 100 languages using Google Translate and works with Cymon for high quality Welsh translations. These tools also support their digital engagement channels, including Telsolutions campaigns, and are being built into the development pipeline for the bespoke DebtorApp. To ensure full accessibility for all service users, XL Enforcement also provides large print documents, Braille, dyslexia friendly formats, British Sign Language interpreters, and RelayUK for hearing impaired customers. They are further enhancing real time communication by moving towards the

		<p>use of Samsung Translate across all enforcement agents' Samsung smart devices while on the road.</p> <p>Jacobs Enforcement</p> <p>provides a full translation service for customers across all contact points, supporting communication in any language through its partnership with TheBigWord, a professional provider offering telephone, online, and in person translation on demand.</p> <p>Agents also carry language identification tools on their iPads, enabling them to quickly identify a customer's preferred language and arrange a translator as needed.</p> <p>Where appropriate and authorised by the debtor, translation can also be facilitated through trusted community groups.</p> <p>In addition to these services, the organisation benefits from the wide language skills of its Enforcement Agents and can provide accessible formats such as sign language interpretation, Braille, and other specialist communication support.</p>
<p>3) That the timescales of meetings with advice centres is revisited to ensure they correspond to their capacity and availability, noting that critical role of advice centres as both a key contact point for residents and a source of specialist advice and support.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>We have asked advice centres about this; so far, the Council has not yet received a response with regards to reinstating these meetings at times that align with capacity and availability of advice centres. Once this is confirmed, Council will ensure the meetings can be scheduled accordingly. Advice centres are indeed valued partners and points of contact.</p>

**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Noticeboards Update**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026 concerning the Noticeboards Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) Subject to the agreement that Council will commit to actively managing and operating the noticeboards as recommended in the budget review process, that clear guidelines are developed for the use of noticeboards, including how new items and updates are managed, and the responsibilities of key holders.	In Part	Agreed, subject to budget discussion.

This page is intentionally left blank

Scrutiny Budget Review 2026/2027

Report of the Budget Review Group 2026/2027

Commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee

Contents

Click the hyperlinks below to go to the relevant section:

Foreword

Chapter 1: Introduction

Chapter 2: Methodology

Chapter 3: Background and Context

Chapter 4: Findings and Recommendations

Place

Environmental Services

Planning and Regulatory Services

Corporate Property

City and Citizens Services

Community Safety

Housing Services

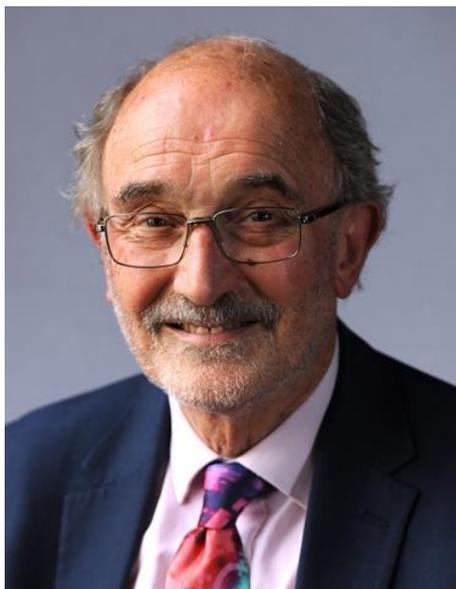
Culture

Leisure Services

ICT

Chapter 5: Conclusion

Foreword



The Budget Review Group (BRG) is an excellent example of cooperation among officers and councillors in a very tight timetable. Five meetings are held by the BRG in January to hear officers answer a series of questions prepared beforehand by the BRG about all aspects of City Council activities, including the Council's wholly owned companies.

Special thanks must go to two officers in particular, Nigel Kennedy, the Group Finance Director, whose team prepares all the detailed Budget forecasts and analyses the impact of changes discussed during the BRG's deliberations; and Celeste Reyeslao, the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, who organises all the meetings, liaising with the officers who attend the meetings and writing up notes of all the meetings and keeping the

whole process on track. This year's Budget preparations are particularly poignant since they are the last ones that Nigel Kennedy will direct before he takes a well-earned retirement.

The details of the Budget and the recommendations made by the BRG are presented in this report. Two features should be highlighted.

First, Local Government Reorganisation means that the City Council will not manage the budget for the area that will include Oxford City in the third and fourth years. Nevertheless, the Budget is balanced over the full four years, avoiding the temptation to which some other councils are said to have succumbed, spending irresponsibly in the next year or two without regard to the harsh legacy that this would leave for successor councils.

Second, the latest financial settlement, published as late as December, is not generous to the city in that, assuming that Council Taxes are raised at the maximum rate that would not trigger a referendum, there is a real term reduction in the City Council budget.

Despite this, with prudent financial management and the income generated by the council companies, the Budget avoids unpleasant cuts in services. Instead, in the proposals that will be submitted to the Council Budget meeting, there is scope for welcome boosts to services.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'James Fry'.

Councillor James Fry, Chair of the Budget Review Group 2026/2027

Chapter 1: Introduction

1. Each year, the Council has a statutory requirement under the Local Government Finance Act 1992 to set a balanced budget. Scrutiny's role within this process is to provide an independent second view through detailed consideration and discussions. This work is carried out the Budget Review Group who is tasked to identify areas where proposals could be strengthened and risks better managed. The Group then formulate recommendations for Cabinet to consider before the final budget proposals are put to Full Council for final approval.
2. Between December 2025 and January 2026, the Budget Review Group examined the Council's draft 2026/27 Budget and the Medium-Term Financial Plan (MTFP) for the period 2027/28 to 2029/30, as approved by Cabinet for consultation in December 2025. The Group's focus was not only on the headline figures, but on the assumptions, risks, and trade-offs that sit behind them, and on whether the proposals are realistic and aligned with the Council's priorities.
3. Effective scrutiny of the budget is considered a cornerstone of good governance. It creates space for challenge and accountability that help ensure that difficult financial decisions are taken with an understanding of their consequences, including the sustainability of the Council services and the consideration of the wider economic and policy context in which the Council operates. Alongside the annual budget review process, the Finance and Performance Working Group maintains a year-round monitoring of spend and performance, providing ongoing oversight of how public money is being used.
4. Established by the Scrutiny Committee, the Budget Review Group has a cross-party membership which mirrors that of the Finance and Performance Working Group. Its membership is as follows:
 - Councillor James Fry
 - Councillor Chris Jarvis
 - Councillor Dr Christopher Smowton
 - Councillor Ian Yeatman
5. Their work is supplemented by additional contributions from the Housing and Homelessness Working Group and the Climate and Environment Working Group where relevant, to ensure that specialist knowledge informed scrutiny of the Housing budget and of spending proposals linked to environmental sustainability.
6. This report is written with two audiences in mind. First, it is directed to the Cabinet, setting out clear, evidence-based recommendations which the Group believes would strengthen the budget. Secondly, it is written for residents, to demonstrate that independent and rigorous scrutiny has taken place, that public money is not being exposed to undue risk, and that resources are being allocated responsibly.
7. It draws out key themes considered during the review and highlights the main recommendations that emerged during the examination of budgets across all service areas. It is not intended as comprehensive analyses of every element of the budget; instead it focuses on areas where scrutiny added the greatest value. The report will be considered by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026, before being presented to Cabinet and Full Council on 11 and 23 February 2026 respectively.

Chapter 2: Methodology

8. The Budget Review Group's work was carried out through a series of five meetings held between December 2025 and January 2026. The purpose of these meetings was to provide an independent, cross-party examination of the 2026/27 budget proposals to test the soundness and realism of the proposals, and to identify areas where further assurance or improvement was required. The Group's examination was primarily based on the Cabinet's draft budget proposals approved for consultation on 10 December 2025, which formed the principal reference document for the review.
9. Key themes and questions the Group sought to explore included:
 - The progress of financial mitigation strategies arising from the various pressures on Council finances
 - The interaction, robustness and financial impact of the financial returns to the Council from Oxford Direct Services and OX Place business plans – including scrutiny of the ODS and OX Place Business Plans and their importance in relation to the financial sustainability of the Council
 - Specific consideration of the Council's planning regarding macroeconomic factors such as inflation and the cost-of-living crisis
 - The robustness of plans and risks to the Council's anticipated income streams, particularly relating to parking, commercial property and the Council's companies
 - The robustness of the HRA Business Plan
 - Assessment of overall strategy and individual proposals to mitigate lost income and to reduce costs, including the deliverability of proposals for income generation and savings
 - Planned borrowing levels and the impact of the changes arising from Minimum Revenue Provision
 - Levels of contingencies and earmarked reserves
 - Deliverability of the Capital Programme and its relation to previous iterations of the Medium-Term Financial Plan
 - The realism of optimism bias assumptions applied to the Capital Programme
 - The risk of slippage in the revenues projected from commercial properties if new lettings are delayed
 - Progress with, and opportunities to exploit further, emerging technologies such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and Robotic Process Automation (RPA) to increase productivity/efficiency
 - The impact of the challenges faced in officer recruitment and retention on the ability to realise the MTFP (e.g., under-achievement of performance targets, unplanned expenditure on temporary staff, delivery of plans and increasing pressure on existing staff)
 - The impact of Government policies on local government finances and plans for Local Government restructure
 - The impact of budget proposals on service users and the wider community
10. The Group's findings and recommendations are informed by the evidence provided by senior Council officers during its meetings, together with detailed written

responses to questions submitted in advance by members. The full set of pre-submitted questions and corresponding responses is included as a confidential appendix to this report.

11. Contributors to whom the Budget Review Group offers its thanks:

- Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
- Tim Bacon, Head of Development (OX Place)
- Helen Bishop, Director Communities & Citizens
- Tom Bridgman, Deputy Chief Executive – Place
- Emma Burson, Finance Business Partner
- David Butler, Director of Planning & Regulatory Services
- Lucy Cherry, Policy and Partnerships Officer
- Paul Concannon, Chief Operating Officer (ODS)
- Andrew Friar, Finance Business Partner
- Peter Gardiner, Interim Strategic Finance Manager (OX Place)
- Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager
- Caroline Green, Chief Executive
- Emma Gubbins, Corporate Asset Lead
- Tom Hook, Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens' Services
- Simon Howick, Managing Director for Oxford Direct Services
- David Hunt, Commercial Manager
- Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner
- Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director
- Rocco Labellarte, Chief Information & Technology Officer
- Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager
- Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
- Tina Mould, Environmental Sustainability Lead
- Nerys Parry, Director of Housing
- Clare Paterson, Strategic Finance Manager
- Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager
- Paula Redway, Culture and Communities Development Manager
- Paul Swaffield, Finance Project Accountant
- Roger Thompson, Managing Director for OX Place
- Chris Urwin, Executive Director – Finance (ODS)
- Rupert Waters, Economy, City Centre and Green Transport Lead
- Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager

12. The Group is also grateful to members of the Climate and Environment, and the Housing and Homelessness Working Groups for their valuable contributions which informed the development of several recommendations:

- Councillor Lizzie Diggins
- Councillor Judith Harley
- Councillor Jemima Hunt
- Councillor Theodore Jupp, Housing and Homelessness Working Group Chair
- Councillor Katherine Miles, Climate and Environment Working Group Chair
- Councillor Ed Mundy
- Councillor Rosie Rawle
- Councillor Kate Robinson
- Councillor Anne Stares

Chapter 3: Background and Context

13. The setting of the 2026/27 budget and MTFP has taken place against a backdrop of unusual uncertainty. At the point at which the draft proposals were developed, the Council faced the absence of a confirmed multi-year local government finance settlement, and the prospect of local government reorganisation within Oxfordshire. The budget, therefore, had been developed with careful and reasoned assumptions, and on the basis that the Council continues as an ongoing concern without making assumptions about the outcome or timing of LGR.
14. In this context, the Council sought to avoid a position that was unduly pessimistic – leading to unnecessary service reductions and avoidable concern for residents and the workforce; or unrealistically optimistic, relying on assumptions that may not materialise and creating risks for future years. Instead, a middle-ground approach was taken. Best described as cautiously realistic, with an aim to maintain stability all the while remaining responsive to changes once greater clarity emerged.
15. For the first time in this decade, local authorities expected to move towards a multi-year funding settlement. Announcements had come later than anticipated and as a result, the Council was required to prepare its budget without confirmation of its final level of core funding. This uncertainty was compounded by the anticipated introduction of Fairer Funding reforms and the resetting of business rates baselines. Whilst there was some degree of confidence that Oxford may benefit from aspects of these changes, the scale and distributional impacts were unclear considering they could have significant implications on the city's neighbouring districts.
16. Alongside funding uncertainty, the prospect of local government reorganisation presented further contextual factor. With final structure, geography, and governance arrangements still to be known, there is widespread expectation that change could occur within the planning period covered by the MTFP. Decisions taken now may therefore affect not only the remainder of the current Council's existence, but also any successor authority. To recognise the complexity of potential changes, the budget included provision for costs associated with preparatory LGR work.
17. The use of reserves has also been a key consideration in the development of the budget, with the MTFP allowing for use of up to £8 million over the term. However, while this enabled the budget to remain balanced in the short term, it was strongly emphasised that this would not be a sustainable position if continued indefinitely.
18. Continued pressures within the Housing Services, particularly the rising cost of temporary accommodation, remain a major driver of expenditure for the Council. Without intervention, these costs are forecast to increase even greater over the medium term. To that end, the budget sets aside £32 million, to reflect a strategic shift towards property acquisition, primarily through the Housing Revenue Account where borrowing is more affordable. This should reduce TA costs and limit the Council's exposure to costly TA markets, ultimately stabilising the spend over time.
19. Taking into account the wider economic environment, in which inflation is expected to slow, Inflation's cumulative impact continues to place upward pressure on pay, contracts, and construction costs. Interest rate assumptions also directly affect the affordability of borrowing. The budget had therefore been built on cautious economic

assumptions, including a council tax increase of 2.99% for 2026-27, the maximum permitted without a referendum, and thereafter to reflect these pressures.

20. Finally, the Council operates within an increasingly demanding regulatory and statutory framework, particularly in relation to social housing. Heightened regulatory requirements limit flexibility in some areas of spend and require investing in risk management and compliance. At the same time, the budget is underpinned by a continued commitment to address inequality within the city. It provides genuinely affordable housing, community grants, advice services, and continuation of the council tax reduction scheme for households on low incomes, with the poorest paying no council tax at all.
21. Taken together, these factors explain the overall shape of the 2026/27 budget and MTFP and is central to understanding the scrutiny work that followed.

Chapter 4: Findings and Recommendations

Place

Environmental Services

Packaging Extended Producer Responsibility (pEPR) and Simpler Recycling

22. The Budget Review Group sought clarity on the impact of forthcoming packaging reforms, including whether they are assumed to be revenue neutral for the City Council and what this means for working arrangements between the City (waste collection) and County (waste disposal) councils. The Group learned that the reforms are not expected to impose additional net costs on the City Council, though the Council is required to plan how it uses the funding allocated through the new system. Local government reorganisation may bring collection and disposal under one authority, but future operational decisions could still carry financial implications.
23. Climate and Environment Working Group members noted the mandatory introduction of plastic film collections from March 2027 prompting questions from the Group, to which it was established that funding adequacy remains to be confirmed. This is because concerns about viable disposal options and the wider role of plastic film within the circular economy continue to require clarity.

Garden waste collection

24. The Budget Review Group highlighted that Oxford continues to levy one of the highest standard charges for garden waste bins nationally, prompting several questions from members.
25. Regarding the net impact on revenues, it was noted that a 10% reduction in the number of garden waste subscribers has occurred alongside a 10% price increase in 2025-26. The Group asked whether the council has reached a tipping point at which further price increases are driving cancellations thereby undermining overall revenue. The Group noted that the current budget assumes a further rise in charges and expressed concerns about the potential negative social impacts arising from reduced collections, particularly where this waste was ending up in landfill (green) bins when not disposed of in the garden waste (brown) bins.
26. The Group also queried whether recent missed collections arising from ODS reconfiguring its collection schedules may have contributed to the increases in terminations of the garden waste service. Members asked whether the Council held data on residents' reasons for discontinuing the service to understand better the drivers behind the decline in the numbers paying for garden waste collection.
27. It was confirmed that Oxford was indeed among the highest charging authorities for garden waste, adding that in the context of LGR, any garden waste diverted into residual waste streams could ultimately attract disposal costs for the incoming authority. Today, the Council does not incur disposal charges for garden waste but an increase in residual waste streams would expose the authority to escalating costs overtime.

28. Given the concerns raised around affordability, the Group recommended freezing the concessionary rate and instead apply a modest additional increase of 0.2% to the proposed standard rate (of 5%), making this 5.2%. This is to reduce the risk of further cancellations and would mitigate potential social impacts, while still broadly preserving the income assumed in the budget.

Recommendation 1: To freeze the garden waste concessionary rate in this year and instead raise the standard rate by 5.2% (an additional 0.2% on the consultation budget) in order to cover the income that would have been generated by the proposed concessionary rate rise.

29. In parallel, improving data captured through the inclusion of reason-based tick boxes on garden waste (and other paid service) cancellation forms would enable the council to understand better whether declining usage is primarily driven by cost, service performance or other factors.

Recommendation 2: That the cancellation form for garden waste collection and other paid Council services include tick-boxes asking about reasons for discontinuing the service, to enable the Council to understand better the reasons behind the decline in use of the services.

Discounted compost bins

30. Whilst the Council cannot itself provide composting services, the Budget Review Group alongside members of the Climate and Environment Working Group discussed a potential offer of discounted compost bins as means of supporting residents to manage garden waste on their own premises. Members suggested that this option could form part of the Council's wider approach to reducing waste volumes and provide support to residents who feel they are priced out of the collection service.

Recommendation 3: To assess the cost of offering compost bins at a discounted rate to support residents in composting on their own site, particularly for those who find offsite collection services unaffordable.

Fly-tipping

31. The Budget Review Group queried the relative costs of providing bulky waste collections compared with clearing fly-tipping, and whether there is a clear link between bulky waste charges and fly-tipping levels.
32. Members were advised that free bulky waste collections previously cost the Council several hundred thousand pounds annually. Whilst fly-tipping incidents have increased, demand for bulky waste has remained broadly steady, suggesting limited sensitivity to current charging levels. It was noted that Oxford's charges sit broadly between mid-to-lower range in line with those of comparable authorities.
33. With Climate and Environment Working Group members highlighting a perceived correlation between HMOs and prevalence of fly-tipped mattresses, the Group explored how this issue might be addressed. Members suggested that HMO licensing fees include a pre-payment or levy to cover the disposal of bulky waste to help to offset some costs incurred by the Council in its effort to control fly-tipping. It was further suggested that a mechanism is introduced where the HMO licensing service notifies ODS of any forthcoming end-of-tenancy periods to allow timely

collection of bulky waste, reducing instances of fly-tipped mattresses or broken furniture.

Recommendation 4: That HMO licence fees incorporate a pre-payment (or a levy) to cover bulky waste disposal to help offset costs incurred by the Council to manage fly-tipping, and that a mechanism be introduced where HMO licensing services notify ODS of forthcoming end-of-tenancy periods. This allows timely collection of bulky waste and reduce instances of fly-tipping of mattresses and other broken furniture.

Street scene

22. The Group explored proposed budget affecting street scene services, particularly increased reliance on manual cleaning in certain parts of the city, particularly Broad Street and sections of Cowley, Banbury and Woodstock Roads which now require manual as opposed to mechanical cleaning due to changes in surface materials. Members learnt that a one-off £45k contribution from the County Council had been provided in respect of the additional work; discussions for longer-term support was currently being explored.
23. Members asked about proposals relating to weed spraying and graffiti removal, seeking clarity on health and safety considerations and the rationale for additional spend. The Group heard that unmanaged weed growth could present slip and trip hazards and that the proposed budget would fund additional treatments to maintain safe standards in these areas. The majority of these costs would be absorbed by ODS, with additional funding targeted at specific high risk locations.
24. On graffiti removal, it was clarified that the apparent reduction reflected the removal of a one-off budget allocation from a previous year rather than a reduction in core service provision, noting that offensive graffiti continues to be dealt with as priority.

Gritting of pedestrian and cycle paths

25. Given the recent cold spells, the Group expressed concerns about pedestrian and cyclist safety, noting a number of injuries caused by black ice on roads, pavements or cycle paths that are well used but not sufficiently gritted. Specific concerns were raised about the ring-road cycleway and southern bypass, which are key routes for commuters and present hazards during icy weather.
26. Noting the fragmented responsibility across different authorities, the Group supported joint working between the City Council, the County Council, neighbouring districts, and ODS to coordinate the salting or gritting of well-used pedestrian and cycle paths when icy conditions are forecast, particularly the ring-road cycleway and southern bypass, adding that any associated costs must be managed through the cooperation of authorities involved.

Recommendation 5: That the Council works jointly with the County Council (as the highways authority), neighbouring districts, and ODS to coordinate the gritting or salting of well-used pedestrian and cycle routes when icy conditions are forecast, including the ring-road cycleway and southern bypass, and manage the associated costs through cross-authority cooperation.

Planning and Regulatory Services

Recruitment challenges and enforcement capacity

27. The Budget Review Group sought reassurance that the Council has sufficient capacity to meet its statutory duties including delivery of biodiversity net gain. Members noted that recruitment remains challenging due to national shortages across planning, environmental health and ecology roles, though retention is stable and capacity has been strengthened through internal progression. The statutory 10% biodiversity net gain requirement was confirmed as non-negotiable.
28. The noted constraints in enforcement capacity, particularly in relation to EPC standards and HMO licensing, are being prioritised by level of risk. Members acknowledged that the Council now had external contractors supporting lower-priority inspections and that this is funded through selective licensing income.

Corporate Property

Lord Mayor's number plate

29. With the understanding that the Lord Mayor's number plate was gifted to the city by Lord Nuffield, the Group asked whether there were any conditions attached to the possible sale of this heritage item. In the similar vein, the Group asked whether the paintings that are currently in the city's possession came with conditions.
30. Members were advised that the number plate was almost certainly gifted to the first Lord Mayor of Oxford though no written record could be found to confirm this. Similarly, any conditions attached to it are unconfirmed. With regards to paintings, it was confirmed that a number of them were loaned to the city a hundred years ago however locating the paperwork to confirm the exact conditions was proving difficult. The Group was reassured that this was a project which is hoped to unravel further detail in due course.
31. In view of LGR, Members asked what would become of all the assets which currently belonged to the city given the likelihood that there will not be a sizeable Oxford City Council in the future. Members explored whether there was any benefit to having a strategy as an attempt to protect its assets for its own use. However, Members were informed that assets and liabilities of the incumbent council would be subsumed into the new authority, which would then take decisions on those assets.

Museum of Oxford and Town Hall Café

32. On the topic of the Town Hall, the Group queried the current exclusive catering arrangement with Elegant Cuisine, the venue's sole caterer. Members noted that whilst the arrangement may offer operational simplicity, exclusive arrangements could deter potential customers who may otherwise wish to hire the Town Hall but are less attracted by the fixed catering offer.
33. Members were informed that the catering contract was due for renewal later this year. Officers explained that previous non-exclusive arrangements where customers were directed to multiple caterers resulted in poor customer satisfaction and lower returns. By contrast, the current sole-caterer model has significantly increased

income, generating approximately £115,000 per annum in commission, amounting to around 10% of Elegant Cuisine's annual turnover at the venue. It was noted that this model has delivered a more streamlined booking system and better financial returns although, as Members noted, it does not suit all customers. With five years of post-Covid data now available, the Council is in the process of reviewing the contract, exploring options and other proposals.

34. Further to this, the Group heard that the Council was considering joint marketing and seasonal offerings with various organisations, which would be advertised to a list of partners in due course, to include Elegant Cuisine.
35. In the Group's view, the Museum of Oxford could benefit from offering paying customers a hot drink with their entry to the museum. This could see added benefit to the Town Hall Café through increased footfall in the vicinity. In addition, the Group suggested offering paying customers 10% discount on its range of products to make purchasing gifts at MOX more attractive than doing so in souvenir shops.

Recommendation 6: That the Museum of Oxford offers paying customers options to make entry more attractive. In particular, it could offer joint MOX/Café tickets that provide a hot drink as well as entry to the Museum to have the added benefit of increasing the number of customers at the café; in addition, that paying customers receive a 10% discount on purchases in the MOX shop with a wider range of products to make gift purchasing in the shop cheaper than in souvenir shops.

Overnight car parking charges

36. The Budget Review Group discussed overnight car parking charges, with Members drawing a distinction between late-evening parking linked to the nighttime economy and "true" overnight parking used by hotel guests or long-journey travellers. Members explored whether parking tariffs could reflect this distinction better, noting the concentration of hotels around the city centre with limited onsite parking.
37. Members also queried how overnight and longer-stay parking is currently managed at Park and Rides, especially for users travelling onward by coach (to London or airports, for example). The Group was informed that Park & Rides already offer multi-day tickets and are commonly promoted by hotels. These are priced competitively with tariffs rising incrementally and largely considered good value, with officers citing an external review of parking provision in support of this approach. Officers mentioned that whilst a dedicated overnight tariff in city centre car parks could be explored, operational and safety implications would need to be considered.
38. In its deliberation, the Group suggested introducing longer-stay Park and Ride tariffs, such as one or two week options, designed to encourage the use of Park & Ride outside the city centre, setting this pricing above the standard rates and adjustable if there proves to be more demand to manage the space taken by long-term users. The adjustable rates are meant to avoid displacing spaces needed for short-stay users.

Recommendation 7: That Council introduces a long-stay parking option at Park & Rides (i.e., one or two weeks), designed to encourage long-stay users such as tourists staying for several days in city centre hotels to park outside the city centre. Any such pricing should be set above standard short-stay charges, and for this rate to be adjustable if there

proves to be a need to manage the spaces taken by long-term users to avoid displacement of spaces used by regular Park & Ride users.

Congestion charge impacts

39. The Group considered assumptions relating to car parking income and the early impacts of the congestion charge, noting that initial figures show income around £500k above budget, with higher Park & Ride revenues set against lower City centre revenues. Members questioned whether larger increases in parking charges in previous years might have generated additional income.
40. Officers stated that it was too early to draw firm conclusions as congestion charge has only recently been introduced, and available data remain limited. Early figures are likely to be distorted by factors including the Christmas period and temporary provision of free bus journeys. With that said, the Group was advised that initial usage data indicated that city centre car park ticket purchases are down by approximately 25%, and P&R usage has increased by around 8%.
41. Officers pointed out that preliminary figures suggested a significant reduction in income at some city centre car parks. For example, Oxpens typically generates around £150k per month, but income in November fell to approximately £67k. Worcester Street, which normally generate around £200k per month, was currently estimated to have earned between £130k and £150k for November.
42. In terms of budget planning, it was emphasised that forecasting was challenging at this early stage given the role of exemptions and permits. The Group was advised that updated projections, including any necessary adjustments or potential draw on reserves, will be reflected in the February budget report once there is clearer evidence available. It was also pointed out that the congestion charge is intended as a temporary traffic measure, to be superseded in due course by more permanent arrangements (traffic filters) under which some users of city centre car parks could access parking facilities without passing traffic filter cameras.
43. In the light of the emerging but still uncertain impacts on parking income, the Group considered potential short-term mitigations, including delaying the planned closure of Oxpens and Worcester Street car parks by one year to preserve revenue, unless development is imminent.

Recommendation 8: That the closure of the Oxpens and/or Worcester Street car parks is pushed back for one year to preserve revenue, unless development is imminent.

Union Street car park

44. The Budget Review Group queried the level of confidence attached to the projected income of £125k per annum over four years associated with the site in Union Street. Officers advised that this remains a higher risk assumption as the site is constrained and the preferred delivery option is not yet decided, with both housing and student accommodation still under consideration. The estimated income figure was based on a developer-led assessment from a number of years ago, and while a financial return is still expected, the changing market conditions mean that final figure may be lower. Accordingly, the income has been pushed to the later years of the plan.

45. The Group asked how any potential shortfall would be managed, to which they were advised that mitigation would not necessarily come from alternative uses of the site itself, but from identifying other opportunities across the wider Property portfolio. Further work will be undertaken over the next year to identify and develop these options, to be informed by more recent appraisal of the site.

Capital investment in waterways

46. The Budget Review Group sought clarification on the proposed £3m capital investment in waterways, querying whether this was primarily focused on specific locations such as the Medley Marina area. The Group was informed that the investment was intended to address all council owned waterways and related assets rather than any single site. This includes rivers, tributaries, culverts and ditches as well as approximately 61 bridges for which the council has ownership or maintenance responsibilities. The programme is being informed by a series of surveys nearing completion and is driven in part by increased flooding risks associated with recent weather patterns and climate change. At this stage, the work remains largely at the planning and assessment phase, with capital projects expected to come forward over time, some of which may be urgent.
47. Members followed up with a question about waterways running through land not owned by the Council, particularly in areas where ownership sits with colleges or trusts. The Group was advised that effective management in these locations will require landowners to acknowledge and take responsibility for their assets, alongside improved regulatory oversight from the Environment Agency, which is beginning to strengthen its licensing role.

City and Citizens Services

Community Safety

48. In discussing the enlarged safety team managing antisocial behaviour and community safety services, the Budget Review Group asked whether the request for additional resources reflected an increase in the complexity of cases or a change in the enforcement approach.
49. Members noted that, traditionally, the service had been focused on environmental crime, noise and neighbouring nuisance, however growing numbers of tenants in temporary accommodation and an increase in engagement with adult homelessness pathway have driven more challenging and interlinked issues involving various teams within the Council. Officers from environmental enforcement, community response and investigation teams have been working together to manage cases via early intervention, relationship building, as well as partnership working, putting emphasis on supporting individuals within their accommodation and mitigating the risk of behaviour escalating. It was emphasised that enforcement powers are used only where necessary. Members acknowledged the approach which had been in place since the Coronavirus Pandemic is considered effective in handling the most complex of cases.

Housing Services

Temporary Accommodation

50. The Budget Review Group, together with members of the Housing and Homelessness Working Group, explored in detail the rising cost of temporary accommodation and the extent to which these costs are offset by rental income from households placed in TA, including those accommodated within the Council's own stock. Members sought clarity on the scale of income recovery relative to gross expenditure. It was confirmed that the figures presented in the budget tables showed gross TA costs only with no offsetting income included. However, rental income from TA is significant, where at mid-year point approximately £500k had been collected, which indicated that income is likely to be around £1m over the full financial year (subject to fluctuations in placements and turnover).
51. Members noted that TA costs have risen sharply in recent years, and that historically, budgets have underestimated the scale of this pressure, raising a concern that the current year's budget may again be exceeded given that by the third quarter, spend was already approaching the full-year budget of £2.6 million. Officers acknowledged that, on current trends, a gross overspend is likely, though this may be partially mitigated by rental income and new TA stock coming on stream in the final quarter.
52. In response to a question about confidence in the forward projections, officers emphasised the inherent difficulty of forecasting TA costs. Members understood that demand is heavily influenced by external factors such as the wider economy, government policy, and homelessness pressures, while supply depends on the availability of both private and social housing, as well as the pace at which new TA units can be acquired or brought into use, with any small changes in these variables resulting in movements of hundreds of thousands of pounds in either direction.
53. In recognition of these risks, it was further explained that the MTFP includes substantially increased TA budgets in future years, alongside a comprehensive set of mitigations. These include the acquisition of additional properties, changes to homelessness assessment processes, and wider demand management and measures. It was established that without these mitigations, TA costs would escalate significantly further.
54. Turning back to historic overspend, Members questioned whether a more conservative approach should be taken by budgeting for even higher levels of expenditure. To which, it was confirmed that figures in the current budget reflected the best and most prudent assessment available, based on detailed joint work between the finance and housing teams. It was acknowledged that, while some risk of overspend remains, reserves are held precisely to manage this volatility, and the Council has neither understated nor overstated the anticipated pressure.
55. The Group was given reassurance that the TA programme is now subject to close and regular scrutiny at senior officer and corporate leadership level, with monthly monitoring of costs, income and delivery. The Group noted that, while the position remains high risk, significant work has been undertaken since Covid to move from reactive management of homelessness pressures to a more structured, long term approach aimed at bringing costs under greater control.

Procurement of TA accommodation

56. The Group also discussed the Council's use of hotel and bed-and-breakfast accommodation within the TA system, and whether recent procurement changes were expected to generate savings. Members heard that a new comprehensive

procurement framework is now in place, allowing accommodation to be sourced from multiple providers according to client need, such as self-contained units for families or higher risk placements. This was driven primarily by the need for a more structured approach and legal compliance rather than to achieve cost savings.

57. Whilst the framework should ensure better value through fair and competitive pricing, any unit cost savings have largely been offset by rising demand for this type of accommodation. As a result, savings are not yet reflected in overall costs, but the Group noted that the council can be confident it was now securing appropriate accommodation at the best available price.

Culture

Twining links

58. The Budget Review Group discussed the Council's approach to supporting international twinning links, noting a perceived reduction in officer capacity and hospitality, and concerns that community-led twinning groups often run by volunteers may be under increasing strain. Members queried whether clearer information could be provided on officer time and financial support devoted to twinning, and whether Oxford's offer compared unfavourably with that of partner cities.
59. It was explained to Members that twinning support is delivered across multiple teams rather than through a single budget line, thus making direct comparisons difficult. This included the civic office, events, grants and other officer involvement. Whilst the described model could maximise limited resources, it may also reduce efficiency and clarity for community groups seeking support.
60. Against this background, the Group recognised the ongoing value of twinning links but concluded that a modest but dedicated annual budget of £20k, to be managed by the Civic Office, could help counteract the loss of officer capacity and provide more direct support to volunteer-led groups.

Recommendation 9: That Council counteracts the loss of officer capacity for twinning by supporting voluntary groups maintaining vital twinning links by creating a £20,000 annual budget, managed by the Civic Office, to be used to support these links.

Leisure Services

61. The Budget Review Group discussed income projections from the Council's leisure contract with Serco and noted its open-book nature provided visibility over the Serco's performance, though some detailed information is still awaited. Members heard that recent data presented to Council showed improvements across leisure facilities, and officers are seeking further clarity on how this translates into income.
62. Members were reassured that financial risk largely rests with Serco, supported by a parent company guarantee. It was emphasised that whilst the contract structure limits the Council's ability to adjust income forecast mid-year, it allows for strong contract management and ongoing monitoring to ensure Serco's performance aligns with Council's expectations. The current "golden quarter" period, spanning from January to March, would provide a critical indication of actual income against projections.
63. Recognising wider sector issues around optimistic bidding and staffing pressures,

Members were given reassurance that these risks are being actively managed.

ICT

64. The Budget Review Group examined ongoing cost pressures within the ICT budget, noting that expenditure has continued to exceed earlier assumptions. Officers explained that a significant driver remains a legacy data-centre contract Council entered into in 2016, with additional pressures arising from Microsoft licensing, which has seen increases of around 20% year-on-year alongside the introduction of new products and application-specific licences. The Group was advised that forecasting remains difficult given the number of contracts involved and the pace of change in supplier pricing models.
65. Members explored the shift to cloud-based systems and its implications for long-term cost control. It was clarified that, while cloud solutions remove the need for large upfront capital investment, they introduce continuous revenue costs, with particular variability linked to data storage volumes. Members were informed that while good data retention can help contain future cost growth, they do not materially reduce existing costs. Also the sector-wide move away from traditional data centres puts limit on alternative options.
66. Members were further briefed on the complex transition away from a legacy telephony contract, where “decoupling” issues are persistently being addressed are expected to complete within the first half of this year.

Local Government Finance Settlement 2026/27

67. Following the publication of Government’s provisional three-year local government finance settlement, the Budget Review Group received a brief overview from the Section 151 Officer explaining that, while the headline figures suggested increased funding nationally the vast majority of it is driven by assumed council tax rises rather than new grant funding.
68. For Oxford City Council, the settlement results in cash-terms zero increase in core spending power in 2026/27, which compares relatively favourably with several neighbouring districts though this still represents real-terms reduction once inflation is taken into account. Overall, the settlement aligns slightly better than anticipated with the assumptions built into the consultation budget, generating a modest favourable variance over the medium term, albeit with continued uncertainty beyond the three-year settlement period.
69. The Budget Review Group was advised that Oxfordshire will not proceed with forming a business rates pool following Government’s decision to reduce the levy from 50% to 10%. With limited upside and a potential downside of sharing losses should a pool enter the safety net, finance directors across the county agreed there was no longer a compelling case. Members were advised that a formal withdrawal from the pooling application will be made.
70. Members also discussed the wider funding context including core spending power and the revenue support grant. Officers cautioned that headline increases largely reflect assumed council tax rises rather than new government funding, and that only a small proportion representing genuine additional cash. Whilst the settlement was

broadly positive against the Council's budget assumptions, pressures remain, and any benefits are weighted towards the later years of the MTFP.

Council Tax Reduction Scheme

71. The Group explored proposed changes to the CTR scheme including the £75k income increase built into the budget. It was confirmed that this figure was a budget target derived from modelling different options, with affordability for the Council being the key constraint. Members noted that the City's share represented only a small proportion of the overall impact and that the majority is borne by the County Council and other preceptors.

Noticeboards

72. Centred around Council's commitment to communities, the Scrutiny Committee made an additional recommendation in light of recent discussions on the effective use of noticeboards. Of the 4 options presented by officers, the Committee recommended that Option 3 be adopted as the Council's approach, which would retain community noticeboards while introducing active management and operation by the Council, costed at £75k one-off spend to resurvey, install, replace or repair noticeboards plus an additional annual budget of £35k for ongoing management and maintenance. The Committee recognised there are existing arrangements in place in some wards either through the work of the parish councils or neighbourhood associations, and urged that this should not be discouraged nor interfered with should the Council proceed with the recommended option.
73. Should Option 3 prove unachievable due to budgetary constraints, the Committee then recommends that Council takes no further action (Option 1).

Recommendation 10: To proceed with Option 3 (Continue with noticeboards, with City Council actively managing and operating the boards) as the preferred approach for the management and maintenance of community noticeboards costed at £75,000 one-off capital investment for the resurvey, installation, replacement or repair of noticeboards, and an annual budget of £35k for ongoing management and maintenance. In implementing this, existing arrangements led by parish councils or neighbourhood association should not be discouraged nor discontinued. Should Option 3 not be achievable due to budgetary constraints, it is recommended that no further action is taken (Option 1).

Chapter 5: Conclusion

74. The Budget Review Group made a total of 9 recommendations intended to strengthen the council's financial position by refining existing policies and targeting intervention where they can have the greatest impact.
75. **Recommendation 1** proposed a modification to a proposed approach to garden waste charging, balancing income generation with fairness and take-up. This was reinforced by **recommendation 2**, which sought to improve the evidence base on why residents disengage from paid services. **Recommendation 3** complements this by further exploring lower cost alternatives for residents who may otherwise be priced out of the service.
76. **Recommendations 4 and 5** address cost avoidance and reducing risk to the council by seeking to prevent fly-tipping and injury before they occur. They seek to ensure that costs, as well as responsibility, are shared appropriately across landlords, service providers and partner authorities rather than falling back on the Council alone.
77. **Recommendations 6, 7 and 8** relate to the more effective use of Council assets, museum and car parks, proposing modest and practical changes to preserve or increase revenues through flexible pricing, without undermining core service users.
78. Finally, **recommendation 9** recognises the value of civic and twinning links, proposing a modest and transparent funding mechanism to offset the loss of officer capacity and empowering voluntary groups to continue that work sustainably.
79. The Review Group was grateful to officers for the hard work that went into preparing the budget proposals, despite some unknowns and uncertainties, and for supporting the Group in their work. In particular, the Group offer their earnest thanks to Nigel Kennedy, Group Finance Director, for his diligent work and his support throughout the review process year after year.
80. In addition to the 9 recommendations from the Budget Review Group, the Scrutiny Committee made an additional recommendation centred on the council's commitment to communities particularly the effective use of community noticeboards, suggesting that Council takes an active role in its management and operation. This has been added as **recommendation 10**.

Appendix 2

Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Budget Review Group of the Scrutiny Committee

The document sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Budget Review Group, endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2026, concerning the Scrutiny Budget Review 2026/27. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

123

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment																																																			
<p>1) To freeze the garden waste concessionary rate in this year and instead raise the standard rate by 5.2% (an additional 0.2% on the consultation budget) in order to cover the income that would have been generated by the proposed concessionary rate rise.</p>	<p>In Part</p>	<p>We have reviewed the likely cost of freezing the concessionary rate and believe it can be delivered within the existing budget envelope.</p> <p>Oxford garden waste bin collection charges are in the highest 1% in England. They have risen by over 50% in the last 5 years. This has led to a decrease in garden waste collections of 20% over this time period.</p> <p>Garden Waste if not disposed of correctly ends up in residual waste, which will further decrease our recycling rate and increase risk of reduced further pEPR grant (linked to recycling performance) as well as increasing costs of disposal.</p> <table border="1" data-bbox="1146 986 2110 1182"> <thead> <tr> <th></th> <th>Collection Type</th> <th>2021/22</th> <th>2022/23</th> <th>2023/24</th> <th>2024/25</th> <th>2025/26</th> <th>% Ch last 5</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="6">Garden Waste</td> <td>Garden Waste Bags Pack 10</td> <td>£38.50</td> <td>£40.35</td> <td>£50.35</td> <td>£55.35</td> <td>£58.50</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Garden Waste Bags Pack 20/Bin</td> <td>£57.00</td> <td>£60.00</td> <td>£75.00</td> <td>£85.00</td> <td>£94.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Concessionary rate for Garden Waste Bags/Bin</td> <td>£45.00</td> <td>£47.16</td> <td>£47.16</td> <td>£50.00</td> <td>£53.00</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Income</td> <td></td> <td>£933,223</td> <td>£1,142,913</td> <td>£1,258,123</td> <td>£1,295,335</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td>Licences/Pa</td> <td>16850</td> <td>15181</td> <td>14957</td> <td>14662</td> <td>13520</td> <td></td> </tr> <tr> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> <td></td> </tr> </tbody> </table> <p>From March 2026 under Simpler Recycling legislation, all LAs are required to provide a garden waste collection service. Legislation stipulates that reasonable charges can be applied.</p>		Collection Type	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	% Ch last 5	Garden Waste	Garden Waste Bags Pack 10	£38.50	£40.35	£50.35	£55.35	£58.50		Garden Waste Bags Pack 20/Bin	£57.00	£60.00	£75.00	£85.00	£94.00		Concessionary rate for Garden Waste Bags/Bin	£45.00	£47.16	£47.16	£50.00	£53.00		Income		£933,223	£1,142,913	£1,258,123	£1,295,335		Licences/Pa	16850	15181	14957	14662	13520								
	Collection Type	2021/22	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25	2025/26	% Ch last 5																																														
Garden Waste	Garden Waste Bags Pack 10	£38.50	£40.35	£50.35	£55.35	£58.50																																															
	Garden Waste Bags Pack 20/Bin	£57.00	£60.00	£75.00	£85.00	£94.00																																															
	Concessionary rate for Garden Waste Bags/Bin	£45.00	£47.16	£47.16	£50.00	£53.00																																															
	Income		£933,223	£1,142,913	£1,258,123	£1,295,335																																															
	Licences/Pa	16850	15181	14957	14662	13520																																															
<p>2) That cancellation form for garden waste collection and other paid Council services include reason-</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>The current form does allow us to collect reasons for leaving the service.</p>																																																			

<p>based tickboxes for discontinuing the service, to enable the Council to understand better whether a decline in usage is driven by costs, service performance, or other factors.</p>		
<p>3) To assess the cost of offering compost bins at a discounted rate to support residents in composting on their own site, particularly for those who find an offsite garden waste collection service unaffordable.</p>	Yes	<p>Agreed as part of a wider programme.</p> <p>Over the next 6 months the Council's Waste & Recycling Team will obtain composition analysis on residual waste across different demographics of Oxford. This will give us insight into how much food, dry mixed recycling and garden waste is not being recycled and is included in the residual waste stream. This will provide the data to build a programme prioritising the behaviour change most needed by geographical area and include finding other ways of reusing and reducing garden & food waste. Home composting, including an option for discounted compost bins will be part of that workstream, alongside working with community action groups, albeit Oxfordshire County Council already offer compost bins for Oxfordshire residents at a cost of £32.98 per bin.</p>
<p>4) That HMO licence fees incorporate a pre-payment (or a levy) to cover bulky waste disposal to help offset costs incurred by the Council to remediate flytipping, and that a mechanism be introduced where HMO licensing services notify ODS of forthcoming end-of-tenancy periods. This allows timely collection of bulky waste and reduce instances of fly-tipping of mattresses and other broken furniture.</p>	No	<p>The licence fee cannot make a bulky waste collection mandatory. We can add further informatives on what to do in the event that a bulky waste collection is needed, raise it at Landlord Forums and publicise in other ways, noting of course that whilst ODS is our preferred method, landlords could arrange for bulky waste to be collected and appropriately disposed of in other ways.</p>
<p>5) That the Council works jointly with the County Council (as the highways authority), neighbouring districts, and ODS to coordinate the gritting of well-used pedestrian and cycle routes when icy conditions are forecast, including the ring-road</p>	Yes	<p>The County Council as the Highway Authority does not currently have a programme for gritting cyclepaths. Gritting within the City is currently undertaken to the County specification which is summarised in the link below. The County fund this work.</p>

<p>cycleway and southern bypass, and manage the associated costs through cross-authority cooperation.</p>		<p>https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/transport-and-travel/street-maintenance-z/salting-and-snow-clearance</p> <p>None of the adjacent districts have the same S42 arrangement with the County Council as the City and the County Council deliver all highway works in the other districts.</p> <p>We have got budget in place to grit some cycle paths, including the purchase of new machinery, and details are being finalised including investigation of the suitability of grit on cyclepaths, staffing and training required and routes that can be covered. We will encourage the County Council to play its part and grit pavements and support with funding.</p>
<p>6) That the Museum of Oxford offer paying customers options to make entry more attractive. In particular, by offering joint MOX/Café tickets that provide a hot drink as well as entry to the Museum to have the added benefit of increasing the number of customers at the café; in addition, that paying customers receive a 10% discount on purchases in the MOX shop with a wider range of products to make gift purchasing in the shop cheaper than in souvenir shops.</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>A public call is due to be undertaken imminently to enable relevant businesses/attractions that wish to offer joint tickets or discounts with MOX. The Cafe would be able to respond as part of this process.</p> <p>The shop already sells a wider range of products than are available in most souvenir shops, at reasonable prices. Discounting by 10% will reduce the overall take at a time we need to increase income.</p> <p>It is likely that other income generating schemes will be set up later in the year e.g. a Friends scheme and we need to reserve additional benefits for that.</p>
<p>7) That the closure of the Oxpens and/or Worcester Street car parks is pushed back for one year to preserve revenue, unless development is imminent.</p>	<p>In part</p>	<p>Oxpens income has been modelled in line with the current development programme and will be kept under review. Worcester Street car park is assumed to be income producing through the MTFP.</p>
<p>8) That Council introduce a permitted long-stay parking option at Park & Rides, such as one or two</p>	<p>No</p>	<p>Both the City Council and County Council agree the fees and charges across all 5 park and rides to ensure consistency. If we</p>

<p>weeks, designed to encourage parking outside the city centre such as for tourists staying for several days in city centre hotels, with pricing set above standard short-stay charges; and for this rate to be adjustable if there proves to be more demand to manage the spaces taken by long-term users, preventing displacement of spaces needed for regular Park & Ride users.</p>		<p>were to consider this it would instead need to be next budget round if County agree. It would be unlikely to result in an increase in income</p>
<p>9) That Council counteracts the loss of officer capacity for twinning by supporting voluntary groups maintaining vital twinning links by creating a £20,000 annual budget, managed by the Civic Office, to be used to support these links.</p>	<p>Yes</p>	<p>This has been included in the Labour Group's amendments to the Consultation Budget.</p>
<p>10) To proceed with Option 3 (Continue with noticeboards, with City Council actively managing and operating the boards) as the preferred approach for the management and maintenance of community noticeboards costed at £75,000 one-off capital investment for the resurvey, installation, replacement or repair of noticeboards, and an annual budget of £35k for ongoing management and maintenance. In implementing this, existing arrangements led by parish councils or neighbourhood association should not be discouraged nor discontinued.</p> <p>Should Option 3 not be achievable due to budgetary constraints, it is recommended that no further action is taken (Option 1).</p>	<p>In part</p>	<p>I agree in principle with the proposed approach, and a view will need to be taken whether this can be implemented this year or is something to be included in the next iteration of the MTFS.</p>

To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 10 March 2026
Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Working Groups for endorsement at the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To endorse the recommendations from the Working Groups.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Chairs of the Scrutiny Working Groups
Corporate Priority:	A Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
1. Endorse the recommendations from the Climate and Environment and Housing and Homelessness Working Groups.

Information Exempt From Publication
n/a

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
n/a	n/a	n/a

Overview

- The Scrutiny Committee is asked to endorse the recommendations from the following Working Groups held since the previous meeting:

Climate and Environment Working Group – 25 February 2026

- EV Infrastructure Update
- Heat Network Update
- Net Zero Tracker

Housing and Homelessness Working Group – 26 February 2026

- Allocations Scheme Review
 - Measures to meet growing demand for Temporary Accommodation
2. Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers, will either, agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations. The tables below detail the Working Groups' recommendations for endorsement by the Committee. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
 3. The Working Groups wish to put on record:
Climate and Environment
 4. The Climate and Environment Working Group noted that concerns have previously been raised by this Working Group regarding the risk of monopolistic behaviour and the potential for the Council to have limited leverage once infrastructure is installed and operational, further noting the importance of a robust approach to procurement.
Housing and Homelessness
 5. The Housing and Homelessness Working Group noted the proposed changes to the Allocations Scheme and asked questions relating to relocation capabilities under unique circumstances such as trauma or mental health challenges, and noted the role of the Exceptional Circumstances Panel in dealing with these types of scenarios. The Working Group also delved into the practice envisioned for the new face-to-face offer in the city centre as means to prevent homelessness noting similar and successful practices by other local authorities. No recommendations were agreed; both reports were supported by the Working Group.
 6. The Working Groups wish to thank Cabinet Members and Officers who contributed to the meetings.

Financial implications

7. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Working Groups.

Legal issues

8. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Working Groups.

Level of risk

9. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Working Groups.

Equalities impact

10. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Working Groups.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

11. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Working Groups.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

12. Implications of Local Government Reorganisation for the reports listed above were outlined within the report when presented at the Working Groups.

13. Where appropriate, any further implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations using the linked guidance from Government: [Financial decisions before local government reorganisation - GOV.UK](#)

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 – Recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group – Heat Network Update

The table below sets out the recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 25 February 2026 for endorsement by the Scrutiny Committee at its meeting on 10 March 2026. The Cabinet will be asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That Cabinet formally write to Central Government seeking inclusion of Oxford in the first tranche of Heat Network Zones to be designated following the commencement of Heat Network Zoning Regulations, so that the Council will have clear statutory powers to enforce delivery against agreed plans, intervene in cases of non-compliance or underperformance, prevent monopolistic practices, as well as ensure transparency and appropriate safeguards.		