

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 30 June 2026

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Committee members present:

Councillor Altaf-Khan

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Elphinstone

Councillor Max Morris

Councillor Corais

Councillor Ottino (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Lancaster

Councillor Thorniley

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager

Courtney Bennett, Regulatory Services Manager

Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager

Richard Wood, Head of Homelessness and Housing Need

Katherine Coney, Residential Regulation Team Area Manager

Also present:

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

Councillor Rowley, Cabinet Member for Regulation of the Private Rented Sector and Preventing Homelessness

Apologies:

Councillor Powell sent apologies; Councillor Thorniley attended as substitute.

Councillor Qayyum sent apologies.

In the absence of the Chair, Councillor Ottino, as Vice-Chair of the Committee, chaired proceedings for the duration of the meeting.

13. Declarations of interest

None.

14. Chair's Announcements

None.

15. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee **approved** the minutes of the meeting held on 9 June 2026 as a true and accurate record.

16. Addresses by members of the public

None.

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

None.

18. Annual Review of the Council of Sanctuary Framework 2025-2028 (Report for Cabinet)

Cabinet, at its meeting on 8 July 2026, will consider a report outlining the progress made in Year 1 to implement the Council of Sanctuary Framework and Action Plan and delivery plans in the next year.

Councillor Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Richard Wood, Head of Homelessness and Housing Need, and Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager, were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Smith highlighted that the report includes a comprehensive summary of the Year 2 Action Plan which focuses on points such as improved coordination and systemwide working, more equitable access to provision across the city, stronger progression routes in employment, and increased involvement and leadership of people with lived experience. The Committee heard that the goal is to transition from a pilot activity to a long-term and sustainable delivery model. Councillor Smith also summarised the need for enhanced communications and community cohesion to combat negative narratives and inaccurate information; reference was paid to social media narratives on topics such as social housing.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager summarised the report, noting that it sets out progress made against the year one action plan of the three-year plan with a focus on six priority areas derived from topics highlighted through research and engagement with residents and partnership work. The Committee heard that the framework aims to ensure a coordinated approach to supporting refugees, asylum seekers, and vulnerable migrants in the city, whilst also retaining a consideration of existing residents and hopes the benefits will be wider for Oxford and residents. A comprehensive summary of key successes to date was delivered, including increased staff training, support for individual projects such as the school advocacy project, and increased support for moves into private sector accommodation. The Committee heard that many of the initiatives within the action plan also aim to encourage people towards independence through focusing on employability skills, health and well-being, and volunteering opportunities. In terms of future challenges, The Refugee and Resettlement Manager noted that attention will be paid to addressing emerging regulations and legislation from national government, continuing to combat anti-migrant sentiment, and continuing to support homelessness prevention via the procurement of accommodation. It was emphasised that this work would be underpinned by an endeavour to ensure residents' voices are included and considered.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Jarvis noted that the report suggested outperformance against KPIs linked to wellbeing, leisure, and therapeutic outcomes; he asked whether this was a result of significant success, or underestimation of the need required from the outset. In the case of an underestimation, he further queried what the impact of this would be, and whether preparations have since been made for higher uptake in the future. Secondly, in reference to the positive housing outcomes KPI, Councillor Jarvis queried why this was not met, and how the Council compares to other local authorities.

In response to Councillor Jarvis' first question, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager explained that the grant funding received by the Council is designated for certain groups and when reviewing the KPIs, the target audience was considered. It was noted this could be reviewed for the year 2 action plan, however, the Committee was also reminded that health portfolios fall under the remit of the NHS; the City Council is only a partner within this work.

In response to Councillor Jarvis' second question, the Head of Homelessness and Housing Need recognised that the target had not been achieved, however explained linkages with the Home Office evictions and shorter notice periods which cause challenges with move on into the private rented sector. The Committee also understood the challenges of being required to make a decision in 42 days following Home Office decisions. The Head of Homelessness and Housing Need committed to requesting some benchmarking data from other councils.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager outlined ongoing work to monitor rough sleeping statistics more comprehensively to track people who have come from Home Office accommodation and have no recourse to public funds.

Councillor Jarvis noted that the report referenced activities to support people once they have been moved on from Home Office accommodation and queried whether this starts before or after they move. This was asked in relation to employment support specifically. Councillor Jarvis also requested information on the timelines and inclusions in relation to the No Recourse to Public Funds Protocol. Lastly, the support available for those living in the Kassam Hotel was queried in the context of far-right protest activity nearby, specifically any lessons learned from last summer.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager explained that the Home Office has a statutory responsibility to support asylum seekers if they are destitute when their claim is being assessed; this is usually through basic accommodation and subsistence. The Committee heard that local authorities are often provided a small grant for this, and the City Council has used this to commission a local charity to provide support. In reference to the Kassam Hotel, the Committee heard that the Council's commissioned partner runs face-to-face drop-in sessions twice a week to offer advice, signposting to activities, and links with relevant services. Furthermore, a Council team attends regularly to offer housing advice. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager demonstrated how this is a proactive approach to offering support within the guidelines of what the Home Office allows.

In relation to the protocol, the Committee heard that the County Council leads this work and the City Council is a partner alongside other voluntary organisations. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager explained that the protocol will be signed off in around 3-6 months, at which point it will be publicised. Members understood that the protocol focuses on the Council's statutory responsibilities and improving what is on offer for marginalised groups.

The Head of Homelessness and Housing Need reassured the Committee that work is proactively ongoing to support the current cohort ahead of the protocol being finalised, for example close working with the Oxfordshire Homeless Movement; the protocol will then provide further structure and emphasis in the future.

In response to Councillor Jarvis' concerns regarding far-right activism, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager outlined ongoing work with Thames Valley Police to provide community safety responses. The Committee also heard that the Year 2 Action plan outlines myth-busting workstreams which aim to reduce the scope of misinformed narratives relating to refugees and asylum seekers. Information was also provided on a range of community activities and volunteer opportunities; a regular litter pick run by the Council and local residents was referenced as an example. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager emphasised this as cross-cutting and noted that partnership working with the police and other districts is critical.

Councillor Altaf-Khan requested that additional statistical data be presented to the Committee on the different communities within Oxford City, and the channels of funding and financial support they receive.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager noted that some data is publicly available and could be provided to the Committee, however, some is confidential due to security and protection requirements for certain groups.

The Head of Homelessness and Housing Need explained that information on grant funding is already included within the existing needs assessment documentation.

Councillor Smith reminded the Committee that the scope of work relating to the Council of Sanctuary accreditation is wide and includes consideration of groups other than those in asylum accommodation.

Councillor Thorniley queried how access to services is evaluated and how successful this has been.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager explained that whilst considered within the action plan, success measurement is hard as the topic is impacted by national and local issues. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager committed to taking this away for consideration.

Councillor Elphinstone noted the importance of communication around housing and community cohesion and recognised the positive results of comms in respect of community engagement. In relation to the refugee employment program referenced in the report, it was asked if any more is being done.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager thanked Councillor Elphinstone for the feedback and explained that the refugee employment programme was a historic project run in partnership with other charities in Oxford that is currently under evaluation. Examples of other ongoing workstreams were outlined, including projects with the youth ambition team on CV writing and employability skills for residents. The Committee was also reminded that resettled families receive employment support, and focus is simultaneously paid to individual and wider projects.

Councillor Morris emphasised the need to focus on the health and wellbeing of those seeking sanctuary and queried whether there has been consideration of other partners who may focus on specific areas of health inequality, such as mental and sexual health. Councillor Morris noted the value of expanding the scope of third sector organisations involved.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager outlined that the Council works in partnership with the NHS and sits on the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership with other district councils, the county council, the police, and the health service. The Committee heard that grant funding is used to support health outcomes, including via an asylum seeker

health coordinator who works to bridges gaps between hotels and primary care, and via counselling services.

The Chair requested that an updated version of the KPIs be circulated to the Committee once available.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

The Committee made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. The updated Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to be published as part of the updated report and circulated to the Scrutiny Committee.
2. Further, localised data and information regarding the refugees housed in Oxford, to be included within the report next year and to be shared with the Scrutiny Committee.
3. To include Community Associations within the updated Action Plan.
4. A bench-marking exercise against similar authorities to the City Council have succeed in positive housing outcomes, linked to government data.
5. The No Recourse to Public Fund (NRPF) protocol, once finalised with Oxfordshire County Council, to be returned to the Scrutiny Committee for review.
6. Measure the impact of the Council comms team regarding myth busting against misinformation.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smith, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager, and the Head of Homelessness and Housing Need.

Councillor Smith, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager, and the Head of Homelessness and Housing Need left the meeting and did not return.

19. Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy (Report for Cabinet)

Cabinet, at its meeting on 8 July 2026, will consider a report which seeks approval for the Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy.

Councillor Rowley, Cabinet Member for Regulation of the Private Rented Sector and Preventing Homelessness, Courtney Bennett, Regulatory Services Manager, and Katherine Coney, Residential Regulation Team Area Manager, were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Rowley provided a summary of the report, noting that it related to changes following the new Renters Rights Act. The Committee understood that the Act gives

new rights to renters, it consolidates previous legislation into a local regime, and it gives the council the legal duty as the Housing Authority to enforce those rights. Resultantly, Councillor Rowley outlined that the Council now requires its own private rental sector enforcement policy to meet the requirements of the Act but also emphasised that this Council has been one of the few nationally to have a licensing scheme for all HMOs and non-HMOs in the private rent sector. As such, the Committee heard that the Council is in a strong position to respond to the changes.

The Regulatory Services Manager explained that the council's corporate enforcement policy will remain in place and is unchanged, however private sector housing will now operate under a much more complex distinct legislative framework; as such, a dedicated policy is required. The Committee heard that this would provide landlords and tenants clarity about what to expect, protect the council's decisions, and ensure the council's approach is lawful. The Regulatory Services Manager highlighted that the policy was developed with the necessary professional bodies for housing enforcement authorities in England and aligns with national best practices and other local authority approaches. The report outlines the framework for meeting the new statutory duties whilst giving protections and confidence to communities of what powers the local authority holds, and how they can enforce these formally and informally; examples were provided.

The Residential Regulation Team Area Manager explained that the focus is to protect tenants, and this can involve investigation of complaints regarding disrepair, investigation of unlicensed properties, and ensuring protections from discrimination. The Committee heard that the changes would allow more enforcement and penalty procedures to be used in the future.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Jarvis queried whether tenants' unions were consulted during the development of the policy.

The Residential Regulation Team Area Manager explained that consultation was not specifically undertaken for this policy, however previous communications with Tenant Unions has indicated their support for a specific policy on private sector housing.

Councillor Rowley also emphasised that the details of the policy are largely dictated by the requirements of the Act and would therefore be uniform across councils. The value and importance of tenants' unions voices in evaluating the policy were however recognised, and it was suggested that they should be involved in reviewing the policy once it has been embedded.

Councillor Elphinstone queried how discrimination by landlords is measured, noting it is an important consideration.

The Residential Regulation Team Area Manager explained that any measurement and investigation must be based on the definition of discrimination used within the Act. The Committee heard that time will be taken to develop an approach with legal support, and the Council is part of focused regional discussion groups which are addressing this topic.

Councillor Rowley also informed the Committee that a new officer with relevant expertise will be recruited.

Councillor Altaf-Khan requested specific data on the number of HMOs and selective licenses in the city to better understand the new enforcement requirements.

Councillor Rowley emphasised that the data is publicly available on the council website and explained that the requirement for new officers is not related to increases in private rented properties, but rather the new regulatory burden and duties resulting from the Act.

The Regulatory Services Manager quoted the data requested by Councillor Altaf-Khan from the Council website and outlined the new funding burdens on local authorities.

The Chair queried whether there is anything further the Council could do to extend beyond the requirements of the Act when asking landlords and agents to sign up to better conditions; voluntary schemes were suggested.

Councillor Rowley outlined that the Council does already operate schemes.

The Residential Regulation Team Area Manager further explained the licensing schemes already in place, such as the fee scheme designed to incentivise accredited landlords. The Committee heard that it is very difficult trying to encourage voluntary actions beyond the legal standards, however, when the Council renewed the additional licensing scheme earlier in the year, it was positively noted as being one of the lowest fees across the country by the National Residential Landlords Association; this demonstrates the Council's commitment to encouraging more than minimum standards.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

The Committee made the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. That Tenants Unions be involved in the evaluation of the implementation of the policy.

3. That further and regular data to be provided regarding the enforcement of the policy to be shared with the committee and included within future reports brought to the committee.
4. That further information to be brought to Councillors regarding Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy, including a briefing to be scheduled.

The Chair thanked the Councillor Rowley, the Residential Regulation Team Area Manager, and the Regulatory Services Manager.

Councillor Rowley, the Residential Regulation Team Area Manager, and the Regulatory Services Manager left the meeting and did not return.

20. Scrutiny Work Plan

The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that the workplan outlines proposed items for meetings of the Committee until November. Members were encouraged to submit via email the details of any additional requests.

The Committee **agreed** the work plan.

21. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

The Committee and Member Services Manager informed the Committee that Cabinet is yet to respond to recent recommendations, but members were assured that the Committee will work alongside Cabinet over the coming year.

22. Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

The Committee and Member Services Manager noted that two working groups had met since 9 June, and the recommendations were enclosed in the report. The Committee was asked to endorse the three recommendations from the Housing and Homelessness Working Group focused on HRA Policies.

The Committee **endorsed** the recommendations from the Working Groups:

Housing and Homelessness Working Group

1. Within the Voids Policy, for there to be consideration for the wider community and social impact

4. Within the Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy, to ensure complaints for Oxford Direct Services (ODS) have a robust oversight procedure and to ensure the timescales within the policy are clearly defined
5. Within the Complaints Policy, to ensure there is clarity on repeated complaints and tightening the wording for public clarity

23. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.20 pm

Chair
2026

Date: Tuesday 11 August

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.