

## Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 14 January 2025

www.oxford.gov.uk



### Committee members present:

Councillor Miles (Chair)	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Mundy	Councillor Ottino
Councillor Qayyum	Councillor Regisford
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Yeatman (substitute)

### Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor  
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager  
Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer  
Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager  
James Barlow, Principal Flood Mitigation Officer  
Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager  
Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)  
Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance  
Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner (HRA)  
Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services  
Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager  
Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager  
Andy Brett, Senior Resilience Officer (Oxfordshire County Council)

### Also present:

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Lead member for Flood Relief  
Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford  
Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities  
Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning

### Apologies:

Councillor(s) Malik and Stares sent apologies.  
Substitutes are shown above.

## 58. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

## 59. Chair's Announcements

The Chair informed the Committee that the former Migration Champion, Councillor Dr Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, had submitted comments regarding the sanctuary framework and noted that these could be considered within the meeting.

The Chair notified the Committee that there would be a break in proceedings later.

## 60. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the extraordinary meeting on 18 November 2024.

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 2 December 2024 as a true and accurate record.

***The Committee then agreed to consider items 7,8,9,10 and 11 next on the agenda, followed by 5,6 and 12.***

## 61. Governance changes to address the increase in Urgent Key Decisions

Emma Jackman, Head of Law and Governance, and Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager, were present to answer questions on the report.

The Head of Law and Governance introduced the report and explained that recently, there have been an increased number of urgent key decisions over the threshold that have not been published within the forward plan 28 days in advance, as is required. Therefore, the decisions have required approval from the Chair of Scrutiny to waive the usual five-day grace period. The Head of Law and Governance noted that several of the decisions related to projects with tight timelines and often linked to external companies. Methods to address the issue are outlined appendix 1.

The Head of Law and Governance summarised some of the actions being taken, including:

- The definition of 'key decision' was discussed at the previous Council and updated meeting to remove confusion. Key decisions now refer to any decision involving a spend of more than £750,000.
- The Forward Plan template was updated and standing items reviewed.

- Templates for officers and councillors were updated and will be available from February to offer more guidance when key decisions are taken.
- New training sessions for officers are being developed; some have already taken place and more are planned.
- An online training package focused on the Constitution is under development. This will be mandatory for all new starters to the Council, and as a refresh module for existing staff.
- Relationships with client companies will be reviewed to understand how their governance requirements impact upon the timing of key decisions. Training will be developed to address this.
- A wider piece of work will take place to assess how client companies and contracts are managed, specifically in relation to commissioning.
- There will be a constitutional review this year.
- Following Cabinet meetings, action lists will be produced to highlight where delegations have been made to officers, and to ensure that guidance exists on the timings of key decisions.
- The Annual Governance Statement for 2024/25 will include information on this.

The Head of Law and Governance invited the Committee to ask questions or express any preferences for topics of future training sessions.

The Chair thanked the Head of Law and Governance for the presentation and invited the Committee to raise questions on other matters within the report.

Councillor Rowley expressed concern regarding the training of company officers. He also queried if there was a legal requirement to have a company secretary, to which the Head of Law and Governance confirmed it is not, and explained that due to recent movements in staffing, the vacancy was only short term and that training with the companies on the Council's governance will take place once transitions are complete. Councillor Ottino noted his concern with the issue and highlighted the possible difficulty of training staff due to turnover rates. He also sought clarity on whether the e-learning is already set up and queried whether a two-year cycle for refresher training could be too long. The Head of Law and Governance explained that the platform for the new e-learning is currently being procured. In regards the timescale for refresher training, 2 years was given as an example and the Committee were informed that the new e-learning will align with the timings of existing data protection training which is likely to be annually. Furthermore, group training sessions have already taken place with management, but further discussions with CMT will seek to identify which team meetings should be attended to deliver more in-depth training to officers.

The Chair referred to the clienting review of the Council's companies and asked why this will not take place until 2026. The Head of Law and Governance clarified that this will be concluded and embedded by 2026; it is part of a larger piece of work on governance changes and will take some time due to the complexities and need to work with the companies on it also.

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss recommendations on the report. Councillor Ottino suggested that in future the number of unavoidable key decisions taken should be fed back to the Committee; the Chair agreed. The Chair suggested that the number of urgent key decisions which are both avoidable and unavoidable should be recorded and presented to the Committee. The Head of Law and Governance confirmed that the number of urgent key decisions are currently reported to Council and included within the Annual Governance Statement reported to the Audit and Governance Committee. She also offered for this to be shared with the Scrutiny Committee going forwards but reiterated that she does challenge key decisions which do not adhere to the required timeframe and only permits them when unavoidable. The timing of this report to the Committee was discussed.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

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

- 1) That Cabinet supports the continued implementation and embedding of the actions proposed to mitigate the increased number of Urgent Key Decisions taken.
- 2) That Officers ensure an end-of-year report is submitted to the Scrutiny Committee before the end of each municipal year, reporting the number and nature of urgent key decisions taken, including data to track trends and evaluate distinctions between capacity-related and unavoidable issues.

The Chair thanked the Head of Law and Governance and the Committee and Member Services Manager for their continued work.

*The Head of Law and Governance left the meeting.*

## **62. Council of Sanctuary Framework**

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services, Richard Wood, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, and Stephen Cohen, Refugee and Resettlement Manager, were present to answer questions on the report.

Councillor Smith presented the report to the Committee and expressed her delight at the achievement of the accreditation which reflects Oxford's history of welcoming people from around the world and supporting refugees and asylum seekers. She explained that the framework incorporates a three-year action plan aimed at supporting the accreditation and empowering local community and voluntary group support systems. She explained that, despite its breadth, the report does not request additional funding. Councillor Smith thanked Refugee and Resettlement Manager for his continued work.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smith, the Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, and the Refugee and Resettlement Manager.

The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager and the Refugee and Resettlement Manager introduced themselves to the Committee. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager described the framework as a bold vision intended to support people seeking sanctuary. Most migrants come to work or study and settle in Oxford, but the Council recognise that not everyone has an easy journey. He explained that officers have built relationships with stakeholders and developed knowledge to support the action plan on issues such as homelessness, housing advice, data collection, and English tuition. The importance of partnership with stakeholders and existing residents was emphasised in the context of a two-tier authority where delivery responsibilities fall across multiple bodies. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager linked the framework to the Council's Thriving Communities Strategy and requested comments and questions from the Committee.

The Chair invited the Committee to raise questions on matters within the report.

Councillor Ottino sought clarity on how many people the report refers to and stressed the importance of this for measuring success. He also expressed concern at how ambitious and broad the plans are, noting a fear that focus could be lost and suggested that more precise targets could be useful.

Councillor Mundy referred to the letter sent by Councillor Djafari-Marbini, as introduced by the Chair earlier, and summarised these points alongside his own comments. Councillor Mundy similarly questioned whether a lack of detail in the report could limit assessment of the framework's success. The Committee heard of his experience working with refugees on English tuition. More detail on the strategies for supporting English tuition were requested and the importance of English proficiency for enabling refugees and asylum seekers to integrate into the local community was emphasised.

Councillor Jarvis thanked officers and Councillor Smith for their continued work and welcomed the accreditation status. He queried specific sections of the report:

- In reference to page 82, section 6.6 he observed that in regards public transport, the phrasing used is incongruent with actions being taken at the County Council level and asked how this could be explained.
- In reference to page 79, section 3.1 he requested further detail.

As general points, Councillor Jarvis also noted that the increased trend of anti-migrant violence in the UK is not recognised in the report and suggested it be included within the actions to prevent such instances in Oxford City. Furthermore, Councillor Jarvis asked Councillor Smith what challenges or implications she expects from the change in government recently on the national policy challenges referred to on page 74.

In response to the questions, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager explained that KPIs are under development across internal and external partnerships to support the action plan which will support success measurements. He explained that the report is a higher-level insight into the strategy of the framework but that the feedback would be taken on board and an annual report, including KPIs, will be made to Cabinet.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager then explained, in reference to cohort size, that the focus on those who have fled war and conflict includes varied categories for which data availability across Oxford City varies. For example, there is some data on those who are in Home Office accommodation, but it is not complete for those who have moved on. It was also explained that plans exist to improve monitoring of data on rough sleeping to establish a more in-depth database on hidden groups.

In regards English language education, The Refugee and Resettlement Manager detailed the partnership work that exists with Oxfordshire County Council as part of the Oxfordshire Migration Partnership. This involves development of a memorandum of understanding to support the availability of English tuition and to identify gaps which can be addressed. The Committee were informed that this work is ongoing and will be reported on using KPIs.

In response to Councillor Jarvis' specific questions, The Refugee and Resettlement Manager stated that transport responsibilities lie with Oxfordshire County Council and therefore expectations must be managed but noted that Oxford City Council does support the recent pilot scheme enabling free bus travel for asylum seekers run between Oxfordshire County Council and local charity Asylum Welcome.

In reference to national policy changes, the Housing Strategy and Needs Manager agreed that the framework would need to keep pace with changes from central government but explained that the report does not contain any plans which have not been deemed realistic and deliverable. He committed to reflecting on this matter and encouraged the Committee to make recommendations on how this could be achieved. In addition, Councillor Smith positively noted that the new government's commitments are helpful for supporting those stuck in Home Office accommodation for extended periods with minimal resources, such as those in a local Holiday Inn Hotel.

Councillor Rowley noted the link between the framework and housing and agreed with Councillor Smith on the positive intentions of the new national policy. He asked whether there had been any engagement with central government concerning the rapidity of evictions from asylum accommodation once settled status is granted. Separately, Councillor Rowley also queried whether the Council has access to expertise on assessing the intersectional needs of vulnerable persons to ensure sensitivity when considering their experiences. He asked specially in relation to any assessment of vulnerabilities of persons within the housing system.

Councillor Qayyum thanked officers. In reference to page 78 section 2.1, she asked what support there is for navigating the housing system and whether the partnerships deliver relevant outreach work, noting that asylum seekers and refugees often do not have digital access and may experience language barriers. Secondly, in reference to sections 2.2 and 2.3, Councillor Qayyum sought clarity on whether it is compulsory for Council colleagues to undertake relevant training, specifically on modern slavery.

The Chair referred to page 65, paragraph 18 and focused on needs assessments and requested that the private information be made public as means of answering some previous questions. Additionally, the Chair suggested that additional focus on bringing communities together could support reduction of far-right activity in the localities. Methods to support and address this were questioned. Finally, the Chair pointed to the narrow geographical data categories used to report on the origins of asylum seekers and refugees; she asked if this could be further disaggregated to support the varying needs of distinct groups, using the example of those from Hong Kong in her ward.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager noted, in response to Councillor Rowley, that the government has been lobbied in relation to the notice period for eviction from Home Office accommodation which has resulted in an increase from 28 to 56 days. He explained this would be in place until June 2025.

The Refugee and Resettlement Manager then focused on the questions relating to the needs of vulnerable persons and detailed research undertaken since 2023 including interviews of over 100 residents of varying immigration statuses. The action plan in the report has been built around this information, appreciating the intersectional needs. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager committed to review this and determine whether more information could be made public. The Chair emphasised that the confidentiality of individuals would be protected and associated risks managed. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager also noted that staff training has been shaped to address intersectional needs to provide more skilled support.

In relation to English proficiency, the Refugee and Resettlement Manager recognised the barriers individuals can face and noted that section 6 of the report addresses issues with digital access. He explained that the Council are updating accessible communication including the website and creating a newsletter, but that the value of face-to-face housing advice has also been supported through weekly officer visits to asylum seekers and refugees in hotels. He stated an intention for more similar initiatives. Furthermore, it was explained to the Committee that Oxfordshire County Council employ an anti-slavery coordinator (who is employed by Oxford City Council) whom Officers plan to work more closely with, in regard to issues related to refugees and asylum seekers.

Councillor Ottino expressed wishes for the framework to be a success and sought clarification on whether there would be a further report on more data driven targets to ensure plans are realistically deliverable. The Housing Strategy and Needs Manager assured the Committee that all actions included in the report are deliverable but



admitted there could be further focus on KPIs going forwards. He committed to sharing this with the Committee in the future. The Refugee and Resettlement Manager noted that the needs assessment does not cover all available data due to privacy requirements but committed to reflecting on this during the development of the KPIs.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

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

- 1) That the Council establishes and reports on clear Key Performance Indicators for its action plan, providing annual updates to the Scrutiny Committee to monitor its progress and ensure accountability.
- 2) That the Council updates the document's text on National Policy Challenges to include contextual information that recognises the evolving policy environment and anticipates potential changes to national policy.
- 3) That the Council acknowledges the prevalence of anti-migrant violence by adding to the Key Challenges section of the document a list of specific responses and preventative measures addressing this key issue.
- 4) That the Council releases the Needs Assessment report to the public to foster better understanding of the experiences of people seeking sanctuary, ensuring that any confidential data it contains is appropriately safeguarded.

The Chair reiterated her congratulations on the achievement of the accreditation and thanked everyone who contributed to the report.

*The Refugee and Resettlement Manager and the Housing Strategy and Needs Manager left the meeting.*

### **63. HRA Rent Setting Report 2025/2026**

The Chair noted apologies from Councillor Turner, Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Jason Jones, Finance Business Partner (HRA), and Nerys Parry, Head of Housing Services, were present to answer questions on the report.

Councillor Smith presented the report to the Committee which recommends a 2.7% increase in rent and service charges in the next year. She explained that this is the maximum increase permitted and that the HRA is under pressure from requirements to maximise income to support funding ambitions, construct new Council housing, and to



retrofit existing housing stock. The Committee heard that the new rates provide value for money and amount to an average rent of £133.68 per week which will support the housing crisis.

The Chair thanked Councillor Smith and invited officers to comment.

The Chair invited the Committee to raise questions on matters within the report.

Councillor Ottino sought clarification of how a garage within curtilage is defined and requested explanation of why garage rent is subject to higher increases when there are many empty garages across the city. It was queried whether alternative options of renting garages at lower rates could be considered. The Chair echoed this question and queried whether there are any restrictions on increasing garage rental charges. She also queried why, in the table in appendix 1, Summertown is excluded.

Councillor Smith acknowledged Councillor Ottino's comments and recognised that there could be potential for more dynamic pricing for garages across the city but explained that the matter is not of relevance to the report being presented which only refers to garages connected to council homes, not standalone garages. It was explained that garages connected to council homes will be subject to a larger percentage increase in rental charges, amounting to around £20 per week.

The Finance Business Partner (HRA) stated that the 4.1% increase on garage rent is part of fees and charges and explained that no legislation exists which caps this. As such, the rental charge would be increasing in accordance with the rest of garage stock. In reference to the Chair's query on Summertown's exclusion from the report, the Finance Business Partner (HRA) concluded that the table refers only to socially rented houses, not shared ownership properties and therefore noted that there must be none in Summertown. The Chair noted concern with the accuracy of this.

In reference to curtilage, Councillor Ottino observed that the total rent on a property with an attached garage would increase more without the choice of the tenant. He queried whether tenants could opt out of having the garage as this would be an unfair imposition. Additionally, in reference to information in section 22, Councillor Ottino asked why rent charges on standing garages are increasing more than inflation.

The Finance Business Partner (HRA) explained that garages within the boundary of a home are for the sole use of the tenant, and this is generally viewed positively. This would be a hard condition to remove and therefore sets the base of how the rental charge is decided. It was also clarified that the increase of 4.1% applies to all garages.

Councillor Ottino commented negatively that the percentage increase in rental charges will be greater for those with attached garages than for those without. He queried why there is not a standard increase and sought an understanding of why this decision was made. The Finance Business Partner (HRA) was unaware of the reason for the

decision but reiterated that it supports consistency. Councillor Smith echoed this and explained a preference not to deviate from this within the HRA and general fund.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

Councillor Mundy expressed a wish for influences on the private rented sector to be monitored and reported on. The Head of Housing Services advised that this would be challenging due to difficulties with disaggregated data due to various influences. Councillor Ottino also recognised the challenges of this and noted there would be nothing to compare against.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

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

- 1) That Officers include a modelling of the impact of limiting garage charge increases to CPI + 1% in the final report presented to Cabinet.
- 2) That the report, and any future iterations, includes a section reflecting on trends in the private rental market, with any relevant anticipated changes for the year ahead.

The Chair thanked officers and the Cabinet Member.

*Councillor Smith, The Finance Business Partner (HRA) and the Head of Housing Services left the meeting.*

#### **64. Withdrawal of Oxford Local Plan 2040 and approval of Local Development Scheme 2025-2030**

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Planning, Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager, and Sarah Harrison, Planning Policy Team Leader, were present to answer questions on the report.

Councillor Upton presented the report to the Committee summarising that the requirement to withdraw the Local Plan 2040 is not ideal but deemed appropriate by the planning inspector. The Committee heard the new plan and timetable for a new local plan is under development and will use previous evidence bases and policies to enable smooth progress. Councillor Upton explained that some updates are required to the plan following changes to the national planning policy framework; several examples were provided. The Committee were offered the opportunity to attend workshops to discuss the refresh and provide suggestions. The Committee also then heard a summary of the last section of the report focused on the charging schedule including

the requirement to increase community infrastructure levy charges on businesses. Councillor Upton assured the Committee that the schedule had been submitted to for examination alongside the new local plan 2042, but that the planning inspectorate failed to complete this due to a shortage of inspectors. As such, a private inspector has been identified to complete this if required, in order to ensure quick progress can be made and CIL money secured for the city.

The Chair invited the Committee to raise questions on other matters within the report.

Councillor Jarvis questioned the impact of local government reorganisation on the timetable of the local plan. The Planning Policy and Place Manager explained that submission is planned by April 2025 and that the process will conclude ahead of local government reorganisation taking effect.

The Chair queried whether, due to the revised and extended end date of the plan to 2042, there are any implications or risks to which the Planning Policy and Place Manager assured the Committee that the extension allows for lost time to be recouped. As such, she explained that 15 years of the plan's adoption have been secured and only minor tweaks to evidence bases will be required which has already been considered.

The Chair queried whether there would be impacts on the review of neighbourhood plans from the alterations to the timeframe of the local plan and sought clarity on how the parallel timelines would function. The Planning Policy and Place Manager assured the Committee that it is usual for plans to develop on different timelines and that it is not an issue. She explained that all neighbourhood forums can continue to go ahead and that their local objectives will be related to the local plan where possible.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

The Committee resolved to endorse the recommendations set out in the report. There were no other recommendations made.

The Chair thanked the officers and Cabinet members.

*Councillor Upton, the Planning Policy and Place Manager, and the Planning Policy Team Leader left the meeting.*

## **65. Flood Management [presentation]**

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Lead member for Flood Relief, Councillor Anna Railton, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford, Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager, James Barlow, Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader, and Andy Brett, Senior Resilience Officer from Oxfordshire County Council, were present to answer questions on the report.

The Chair noted the importance of the presentation considering the increasing severity of flooding in Oxford City and requirement to consider emergency planning.

Councillor Railton introduced the topic and invited the Community Safety Service Manager to present.

The Community Safety Service Manager provided an overview of the Civil Contingencies Act 2004 which places legal duties on councils to assess the risks and impacts of all emergencies, including flooding. He explained the importance for Oxford City Council to have emergency plans and business continuity plans in place which ensure the public are warned and first responders are prepared but highlighted that Oxford County Council are a lead responder in flood events. The Committee heard of the extensive detail on the emergency response plans that were contained within the report. The Community Safety Service Manager also informed the Committee about the varying types of floods Oxford experience, issues with rising tide situations and flash floods, methods used to communicate plans within the council and residents, and the structure of the response hierarchy. Previous examples of floods in Oxford were used to demonstrate the information provided.

The Chair thanked the Community Safety Service Manager for the detail of the presentation and invited the Committee to raise questions on other matters within the presentation.

Councillor Rowley noted that ODS currently hold a small number of flood pumps and one flood barrier. Considering increasing flood risks, he queried whether there are plans to obtain further resources. The Community Safety Service Manager explained that pumps are held in collaboration with different agencies including the Environment Agency and therefore, more are available for deployment beyond that owned by ODS. The Committee were assured these can be accessed as required and in accordance with the severity of a flood. The Senior Resilience Officer added that pumps are only useful when there is a safe location to pump the water away to, which is often limited in built up areas. Additionally, the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader explained that interventions such as pumps and barriers are elements considered within the strategic plan. He also agreed that more barriers will be needed in the future. Councillor Chapman noted his experience in emergency response events and commented on his faith in the capabilities of Oxford's flood response teams. The Chair echoed this sentiment based on the views of residents.

The Chair queried whether there is a requirement for more budget to ensure that enough people are available to support responses to flooding events and what data is collected and used during the recovery and learning phase to ensure flooding plans are usefully adapted. Finally, the Chair noted that there is not a structure for volunteer coordination and queried whether this was needed and whether other Councils had this.

Councillor Ottino noted that whilst Oxford County Council is responsible for investigations following flood events, many residents note little is being done to combat issues in regions of the city where repeat flooding occurs, such as Blackbird Leys. He therefore asked if it can be made more widely known who is responsible for issues with flood defence maintenance. The Chair linked this to the possibility of having a contact point regarding flood maintenance and suggested ward councillors.

Councillor Chapman expressed concern about this and noted the importance of rules and hierarchy structures during emergency responses. He also assured the Committee that ODS is well equipped to respond to flood incidents and encouraged the Committee to value the systems that already exist. Councillor Chapman also expressed that it would be unhelpful for councillors to act as contact points and explained the confusion that bilateral conversations could cause. The Committee were referred to the Community Safety Service Manager if they had concerns on this. Councillor Ottino clarified that he made his query in relation to prevention work, not response work during an event. Councillor Chapman reiterated that river flooding often comes with warning times and that existing systems are well set up to handle this.

The Chair thanked Councillor Chapman for his representations based on his experience in the field of emergency response.

The Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader responded to questions on data and explained that flood planning is dependent on residents reporting floods, which they often fail to do due to insurance related fears. The Committee learned that this produces gaps in data. In regard volunteering, the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader emphasised that flood events are dangerous and those involved must be trained sufficiently. The Committee were informed that Oxford County Council manages a flood warden programme with training which would be the best option for volunteering. Details of this are available within the council's online flooding toolkit. Finally, the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader explained that Oxford County Council flood authority is responsible for planning flood investigations, but that Oxford City Council conduct them. Examples of ongoing investigations were provided including Campbell Road.

The Chair thanked the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader for the information he provided on the warden programme and encouraged the Committee to communicate this with residents.

In regards resourcing, the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader also noted that wider flood plans exist in collaboration with various agencies and contact details on these could be circulated.

Councillor Railton responded to Councillor Ottino's query regarding maintenance of local flood infrastructure such as ditches and gulleys. She explained that work is currently ongoing to designate responsibility and committed to checking on the progress of this. Councillor Railton also commented that an aspect of reality is necessary in recognising that floods cannot always be prevented. As such, residents need to help mitigate damage to their own homes and a leaflet with relevant information will be circulated soon. Sandbags were noted as an important consideration for residents to consider purchasing for floods events. Furthermore, in regards flood warning, the Committee heard of an example in South Oxford where a local network of streets cooperate to support each other during a flood event. Councillor Railton encouraged the replication of this across Oxford city. Finally, Councillor Chapman's assertion of the importance of chains of command in emergency events was reiterated.

Councillor Yeatman queried whether Flood Investigation reports currently being prepared will come to ward councillors, to which the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader clarified it would be published on the County Council website but offered to circulate it to members. Councillor Yeatman noted interest in this report regarding the Florence Park area specifically to ensure residents finally received answers.

The Community Safety Service Manager explained that the council holds a reserve for emergency planning but that costs cannot always be predicted. The Committee learned that this would need topping up in the future as the increasing trend of floods requires this reserve to be accessed more regularly. Councillor Chapman assured the officers that requests for more money would be taken seriously and supported. The Chair queried whether it would be feasible to assess future funding requirements to which the Community Safety Service Manager agreed, commenting that this would aid in predicting when the reserve may need increasing.

The Chair invited the Committee to consider recommendations.

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

- 1) That Cabinet ensures Members are informed whenever flood investigations occur within their areas; sharing findings promptly will enable Councillors to respond effectively to residents' concerns and advocate for necessary measures.
- 2) That Cabinet develops clear contact information for Members and distributes guidance leaflets to residents at risk of flooding, explaining proper reporting of flood incidents and actionable advice on mitigating flood risks, and support available for vulnerable residents.



- 3) That Cabinet commits to long-term flood resilience and preparedness in the context of the need for climate adaptation measures, by reviewing and reassessing the adequacy of emergency planning funding reserves, recognising the growing frequency and severity of flooding in Oxford.

The Chair thanked all officers and the Cabinet members and invited the Committee to discuss recommendations.

*Councillor Chapman, Councillor Railton, the Community Safety Service Manager, the Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader, and the Senior Resilience Officer from Oxfordshire County Council left the meeting.*

## **66. Work Plan**

The Scrutiny and Governance Adviser notified the Committee of one alteration to the work plan: the deference of the online payment system rollout.

The Committee agreed the work plan.

## **67. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings**

The Chair notified the Committee that all recommendations are contained within the agenda pack and highlighted that there had been 13 recommendations across 6 reports to Cabinet at the December meeting.

The Chair invited any questions from the Committee.

The Scrutiny and Governance Adviser notified the Committee that the Finance Panel met since December and made one recommendation the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group. The Committee also heard that the Budget Review group met five times, and the report will be brought to the Committee at the next meeting.

The Committee raised no questions.

## **68. Dates of future meetings**

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor noted two corrections:

1. That the meeting on 1 April would now take place on 26 March.
2. That there will also be a meeting on 29 January.

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.



**The meeting started at 6.10 pm and ended at 8.50 pm**

**Chair .....**  
**January 2025**

**Date: Wednesday 29**

*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.*