

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 26 March 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Miles (Chair)	Councillor Jarvis
Councillor Latif	Councillor Ottino
Councillor Rehman	Councillor Regisford
Councillor Rowley	Councillor Stares

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

Also present:

Councillor Lubna Arshad, Cabinet Member for a Safer Oxford

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Mundy and Qayyum sent apologies.

90. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

91. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Councillor Rehman to his first meeting of the Scrutiny Committee following his recent appointment.

The Chair also announced that there would be a break of 10 minutes at 18.25 to support members observing Ramadan. As such, agenda items would be considered in the following order: 8, 7, 4, 5, 6, 9.

Councillor Regisford joined the meeting.

92. Anti-Social Behaviour Update

Councillor Arshad, Cabinet member for a Safer Oxford, and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager, were present to respond to questions.

Councillor Arshad introduced the report, noting that antisocial behaviour (ASB) affects everyone by threatening safety and wellbeing; as a result, a clear, fair, and robust approach is required. The Committee heard that the ASB policy is refreshed every three years to ensure it remains responsive and committed to protecting the community. This is a statutory responsibility of the Council. Councillor Arshad also reminded the Committee that Oxford City Council is part of the Oxford Safer Communities Partnership which works collaboratively to reduce crime and disorder and tackle root causes. The draft policy presented for 2025-2028 focuses on identifying and preventing ASB and will be subject to public consultation, with a final version of the report returning the Scrutiny Committee in September.

The Community Safety Service Manager summarised the report and outlined the aims of the policy, definitions of ASB, and the public consultation intended to focus on peoples' experiences and policy standards.

Councillor Rowley joined the meeting.

The Community Safety Service Manager also provided examples to illustrate the classifications of ASB within the policy and linked these to different responsible agencies. The complexities involved with reporting ASB were also described.

The Chair thanked the Community Safety Service Manager.

Councillor Rowley requested clarification regarding the timescales for removing and responding to racist graffiti. The Community Safety Service Manager explained that targets seek to remove such graffiti within 24 hours (via ODS) and investigate and respond within 3 days. It was noted that both targets are often exceeded.

Councillor Rowley also asked whether ASB complaints are routinely passed on to other agencies when the Council is not the responsible body and requested clarification regarding the application of classifications of ASB. The Community Safety Service Manager explained that the Council initially contacts complainants who are being referred and then reports to the appropriate body, whether this be the police or landlords. As regard classifications of ASB, the Committee were assured that each complaint is assessed on a case-by-case basis with discretion, and that any intervention is approached with proportionality in mind.

Councillor Stares queried whether there are limitations on the Council's powers to intervene, to which the Community Safety Service Manager described the range of

powers which Oxford City Council holds, and the tools used for mediation and conversation with necessary parties. The Committee heard that a lack of evidence is often an issue which restricts the Council's ability to impose legal powers.

Councillor Ottino firstly requested that phrasing utilised within the report in reference to environmental crime be reassessed. Secondly, in regards obstructions of highways, it was asked whether the police often become involved, and more information was requested regarding where the responsibility for this matter lies and the parameters of the areas involved - for example, pavements and verges. Finally, Councillor Ottino queried what powers the Council holds to respond to matters relating to pests and residential gardens. The Community Safety Service Manager committed to reassessing the wording used in relation to environmental crime and explained that measures to tackle obstruction of highways is led by Oxfordshire County Council. The Committee however heard that Thames Valley Police often intervene and provide useful information online. In regards gardens and pests, the Community Safety Service Manager noted the difficulty in managing this matter but confirmed that action is usually taken if the report is indicative of larger issues, such as pest issues or safeguarding concerns. In these instances, the complaint would be triaged and assessed.

The Chair invited the Committee to break at 18.25 for 10 minutes.

The meeting resumed at 18.35.

Councillor Rehman asked how the consultation described in the report differs from those previously conducted and queried how information regarding ASB linked to drinking in public places is ascertained. The Community Safety Service Manager clarified that the consultation process will be similar to previous versions but with additional emphasis on tenant involvement through focus groups. The Committee were informed that this aspect has been strengthened due to the landlord responsibilities now outlined in the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. In regards ASB and public alcohol consumption, the Community Safety Service Manager outlined the use of Public Spaces Protection Orders and powers by the police and council officers which enable hotspots to be attended, and persons approached. The Committee were assured that the Council works closely with local neighbourhood policing teams to monitor, and problem solve and is also supported by access to a police computer in the Town Hall. It was emphasised that in all scenarios, the health and safety of staff is a priority and when required, cases may be referred to the police.

Councillor Ottino asked whether officers maintain good contact with the various housing associations, including the smaller examples. The Community Safety Service Manager confirmed that this does exist and detailed the contact which occurs with regional hubs and local staff. The Committee were also informed that expected legal changes should permit social landlords the powers to apply for Closure Orders when necessary, and that it is the statutory duty of the Council to investigate noise complaints and liaise with landlords. The Community Safety Service Manager however noted that communication with some providers could be further strengthened. In regards the reporting of ASB, the

Community Safety Service Manager assured the Committee that the Council does its best to triage and refer all complaints as appropriate, and to inform residents of the council's powers. Use of FixMyStreet was also recommended. The Community Safety Service Manager invited Councillor Ottino to speak to him separately if he held particular concerns.

The Chair sought further information on the issues that officers experience with evidence gathering, citing the example of cannabis use in blocks of flats, and asked how and where gaps in coordination between agencies are experienced. The Community Safety Service Manager explained that noise complaints are the most reported issue in relation to ASB, therefore the Council advertises the use of reporting facilities such as noise recording apps to provide evidence. In regards cannabis, the Committee heard of the difficulties experienced in determining the location of cannabis use, but were assured that when this is ascertained, the police will attend. If there are any breaches of the tenancy agreement held with the Council, then officers can also take further action. The Community Safety Service Manager noted that the issue of the smell of cannabis in residential settings is becoming more common but also one of the hardest to tackle. In regards coordination, the Community Safety Service Manager assured the Committee that the Council works well with ODS around environmental enforcement actions and evidence gathering to identify hotspots and conduct early morning patrols. Cooperative partnership working was also noted with the Regulations Team, Housing Teams, and GPs to support safeguarding and vulnerable persons. The Committee were also informed that the Council infrequently handles issues with roads and highways as the powers for this are predominantly held with the police or Oxfordshire County Council; they do however work with these bodies where possible.

In reference to measures taken in Swindon to tackle inconsiderate parking, the Chair asked whether Oxford City Council has considered similar options. The Community Safety Service Manager expressed willingness to discuss this with Oxfordshire County Council colleagues to identify if there is a role for Oxford City Council but noted that they do not have the power or budget to take such actions forwards at present. It was clarified that parking on pavements would not usually sit under the banner of ASB.

Councillor Ottino suggested that redesigning existing public spaces could be key to encouraging a reduction in ASB, referencing issues associated with alley ways and disused garages. The Community Safety Service Manager agreed that this could be a proactive approach to future planning of the city and committed to discussing this with colleagues. The Committee were informed that the Council does employ a Community Safety Problem-Solving Officer who is specifically tasked with problem solving and collaborating with planners and the police.

Councillor Latif joined the meeting

The Committee discussed possible recommendations.

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

1. That the Anti-Social Behaviour Policy incorporate a clause referencing the principles of 'Safe by Design' in public spaces, and ensure its application in the planning of new public spaces and redesign of existing locations identified as hotpots for anti-social behaviour.
2. That Council explore approaches to pavement parking as a form of ASB, for example identifying any multi-agency approaches to combat such problems trialled in designated areas by other local authorities, and assess the feasibility of implementing similar measures locally, noting the potential need for cross-agency collaboration in enforcement and policy development.

The Chair thanked Councillor Arshad and the Community Safety Service Manager.

Councillor Arshad and the Community Safety Service Manager left the meeting.

93. Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update

Jonathan Malton, the Committee and Member Services Manager, was present to respond to questions.

The Committee and Member Services Manager introduced the report, outlining that it is a response to the Committee's request for information regarding the five urgent key decisions taken in the last municipal year. The report is linked to discussions of the matter at a previous meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on 14 January 2025. The Committee and Member Services Manager also outlined the steps taken with the Monitoring Officer to implement changes, such as the introduction of an additional forward plan to monitor key decisions.

The Chair thanked the Committee and Member Services Manager and Councillor Ottino commented positively on the value of the report.

The Chair asked whether the report could be produced annually to which the Committee and Member Services Manager explained that information on key decision is already reported to Council as a requirement of the constitution, but that this could be extended to the Scrutiny Committee.

Councillor Ottino and the Chair discussed the process behind urgent key decisions and the Committee discussed whether they believed it valuable for a similar report to be brought to the Scrutiny Committee annually. Councillor Rehman supported this suggestion. The Committee and Member Services Manager suggested that a report could be produced annually should the issue of increased urgent key decisions re-emerge in the following year.

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

1. That an end-of-year summary update on Urgent Key Decisions is provided to the Scrutiny Committee, at the discretion of the Scrutiny Chair, in the next municipal year, enabling the Committee to assess whether the mitigations implemented have effectively addressed the high frequency of these decisions.

94. Minutes

The Chair highlighted two errors within the minutes requiring correction including the addition of a value regarding the figure of 1.8 on page 15, and the replacement of 'hard' with 'heard' on page 16.

Subject to the amendments noted, the Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 3 March 2025 as a true and accurate record.

95. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor informed the Committee that 4 items were expected for the next meeting in June and that the Forward Plan would be updated and available from 1 April. The Committee were invited to request items be added to the Forward Plan and assured that any changes would be agreed with the Chair as required.

The Committee **agreed** the Work Plan.

96. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor informed the Committee that since their last meeting, the Housing and Homelessness Panel had met once on 3 March 2025 and discussed 5 substantive items. The Panel made 3 recommendations to Cabinet, as set out in the report.

The Committee raised no questions and **noted** the update.

97. Dates of future meetings

The Chair stated that the next meeting of the Scrutiny Committee would be on 10 June 2025, noting that the membership of the Committee may have changed by which time

and thanked all members for their work during the last year. Members also thanked the Chair.

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

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.15 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 10 June 2025

When decisions take effect:

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

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

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.

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