

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 10 June 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Powell (Chair)	Councillor Altaf-Khan
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Latif
Councillor Miles	Councillor Mundy
Councillor Ottino	Councillor Qayyum
Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)	Councillor Stares

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Celeste Reyeslao, Scrutiny and Governance Advisor
Hannah Carmody-Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer
Jonathan Malton, Committee and Member Services Manager
Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager
James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager
Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager
Sarah Harrison, Team Leader (Planning Policy)
Katherine Mayes, Customer Care and Complaints Manager
Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Also present:

Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for a Healthy, Fairer Oxford and Small Business Champion
Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture
Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Azad and Corais sent apologies.
Substitutes are shown above.

1. Election of Chair for the Council Year 2025/26

Councillor Miles proposed, and Councillor Jarvis seconded the nomination of Councillor Powell to be elected as Chair of the Committee for 2025/26.

No further nominations were received.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved that Councillor Powell be elected as the Chair for 2025/26.

2. Election of Vice-Chair for Council Year 2025/26

Councillor Ottino proposed, and Councillor Altaf-Khan seconded the nomination of Councillor Rowley to be elected as Vice-Chair of the Committee for 2025/26.

No further nominations were received.

The Scrutiny Committee resolved that Councillor Rowley be elected as the Vice-Chair for 2025/26.

3. Apologies for Absence

Councillor Azad and Councillor Corais sent apologies.

4. Declarations of interest

The Chair notified the Committee that he is an employee of Oxford Brookes University which is mentioned in the Local Plan being discussed during this meeting. The Chair had taken advice from the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor and would be remaining for the duration of the relevant item.

Councillor Stares informed the Committee that she is a trustee of Littlemore Community Centre.

5. Chair's Announcements

In response to issues with accessing the online agenda and reports for the meeting, the Chair proposed a ten-minute adjournment to allow Committee members to familiarise themselves with the reports being discussed to ensure proper scrutiny could take place.

Councillor Qayyum joined the meeting.

Councillor Altaf-Khan noted that he had not been able to access the papers and therefore felt that he would be unable to scrutinise the reports sufficiently. Councillor Altaf-Khan suggested that some items be delayed for consideration at a future meeting and that Cabinet be accommodating of these delays.

The Chair took advice from the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor listed the items which were expected at the next meeting of Cabinet on 18 June 2025 (Leisure Investment Programme Update and More Leisure Service Annual Plan, Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document and Annual Housing Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report). On this basis the Chair recommended that the Committee progress with the meeting as planned and requested that members return from an adjournment at 18.20.

Councillor Mundy joined the meeting.

The Committee resumed at 18.20.

The Chair thanked the Committee for their time to taken to consider the papers.

The Chair reordered the agenda; items would be taken in the following order: 7, 9, 8, 10, 6, 11, 12.

6. Scrutiny Operating Principles 2025/26

The Director of Law, Governance and Strategy had submitted a report seeking the Committee's agreement to the adoption of a set of Scrutiny Operating Principles for the 2025/26 Council year, the establishment of standing working groups and review groups, the appointment of standing working group and review group chairs and a proposed work plan to September 2025.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor summarised the report and individually outlined the recommendations that the Committee were required to consider.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Jarvis, in relation to recommendation 4, queried the disparity noted in the report between the number of names listed for the Housing and Homelessness working group and the number of members outlined for each working group in the guidance. The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that as best practice, four members are recommended for each working group however more can be assigned and the number extended in line with political proportionality of one member of each political group per working group. It was also clarified that this can also be extended to other independent groups through discussion.

Councillor Miles noted feedback that the Housing and Homelessness working group often focuses on financial information and therefore asked whether some of the content could be reassigned within the scope of the Finance and Performance working group

going forward to manage workload and ensure due attention is given to the matter of homelessness. The Chair committed to taking account of this when considering the terms of reference.

The Chair proposed to consider the recommendations in the report.

The Committee first considered recommendation 1. The Chair proposed, and Councillor Ottino seconded for the Committee to agree the proposed operating principles for the 2025/26 municipal year, as set out in appendix 1. The Committee **agreed**. Councillor Altaf-Khan abstained.

The Committee considered recommendation 3. Councillor Miles noted her concern about the assignment of work to the Housing and Homelessness working group but did not propose a formal alteration to the recommendation. The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor clarified that the Committee has the power to delegate work to the working groups and to alter plans. The Chair proposed and Councillor Jarvis seconded that the Committee agree to establish the working groups for the 2025/26 municipal year with remits as outlined in the report. The Committee **agreed**. Councillor Altaf-Khan abstained.

The Committee considered recommendation 9. The Chair proposed, and Councillor Rowley seconded, that the Committee agree the Terms of Reference for the Climate and Environment Working Group, the Finance and Performance Working Group, and the Housing and Homelessness Working Group. The Committee **agreed**. Councillor Altaf-Khan abstained.

The Committee considered recommendation 4.

- In regard the Finance and Performance working group, the Chair proposed to adopt the membership as set out in the report and Councillor Ottino seconded. Members voted unanimously in agreement. The Chair invited nominations for Chair. Councillor Qayyum proposed Councillor Fry; Councillor Jarvis seconded. No further nominations were received. The Committee voted to appoint Councillor Fry as Chair.
- In regard the Housing and Homelessness working group, the Chair proposed to adopt the membership as set out in the report and Councillor Ottino seconded. Members voted unanimously in agreement. The Chair invited nominations for Chair. Councillor Qayyum proposed Councillor Diggins; Councillor Ottino seconded. Councillor Mundy proposed Councillor Jupp; Councillor Miles seconded. The nominations were put to a vote, and by 6 votes to 4, the Committee voted to appoint Councillor Jupp as Chair.

- In regard the Climate and Environment working group, the Chair proposed to adopt the membership as set out in the report and Councillor Latif seconded. Members voted unanimously in agreement. The Chair invited nominations for Chair. Councillor Qayyum proposed Councillor Hunt; Councillor Ottino seconded. Councillor Jarvis proposed Councillor Miles; Councillor Altaf-Khan seconded. The nominations were put to a vote, and by 6 votes to 3, the Committee voted to appoint Councillor Miles as Chair.

The Committee considered recommendation 5. The Chair proposed, and Councillor Latif seconded, that the Committee agree establish a Budget Review Group, comprising the membership of the Finance and Performance Working Group, noting that the proposed scope will be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting. The Committee **agreed**. Councillor Altaf-Khan abstained.

The Committee considered recommendation 6. The Chair proposed, and Councillor Miles seconded that the Committee agree the scheduled of meetings as set out in the report. The Committee **agreed**.

The Committee considered recommendation 7. The Chair proposed and Councillor Rowley seconded that the Committee agree the preliminary work plan to September 2025 as set out in the revised appendix 2 of the report, and that Committee members will send additional ideas for topics for Scrutiny-commissioned reports to the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor by e-mail for consideration at future Committee meetings. The Committee **agreed**.

The Committee considered recommendation 8. The Chair proposed, and Councillor Ottino seconded that the Committee delegate authority to the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee, to endorse and forward Working Group recommendations to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Groups and be reported back to the Scrutiny Committee at the next meeting. The Committee **agreed**.

The Committee considered recommendation 2. The Chair proposed and Councillor Miles seconded that the Committee recommend to Council to amalgamate the Operating Principles into Part 13 (Scrutiny Committee Procedures) of the Council's Constitution. The Committee **agreed**.

7. Leisure Investment Programme Update and More Leisure Service Annual Plan

Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 June 2025, will consider and report setting out the highlights of the first year of the new leisure contract and to approve the Annual Service Plan 2025-26, which is an annual requirement of the operator, aiming to align outcomes to the council's priorities and to address health inequalities.

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

Councillor Chewe Munkonge, Cabinet Member for A Healthy Oxford, Hagan Lewisman, Active Communities Manager, and James Baughan, Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager were present to answer questions. Robert Jennings, Contract Manager (Serco Leisure) was also present.

The Chair introduced the title of the report and reminded the Committee it would not be the appropriate time for members to raise wider concerns relating to Serco Group beyond its remit as a contracted leisure provided to the Council.

Councillor Munkonge introduced the report and echoed the Chair's request that discussion remain focused on the performance of More Leisure. Councillor Munkonge praised the work of the officers, clarified that the Council is entering the second year of the contract, and summarised some highlights from the report.

The Chair invited comments from officers.

The Active Communities Manager welcomed Rob Jennings from Serco Leisure as the face of the contract, praising his ongoing hard work in conjunction with Council officers. The Committee also heard that the need for some improvements is recognised, and that feedback and suggestions were welcome.

The Chair invited the Contract Manager from Serco Leisure to speak.

The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure provided an overview of the contract and explained that data from year one has been utilised as a baseline dataset to assess performance and outline investment to date. The Committee were informed of the growth in customer usage of health and fitness facilities and swimming products and noted the inclusion of the Annual Service Plan within the report which outlines the partnership work and connection with the Council's priorities.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino thanked officers for the provision of refugee and women only swimming sessions and noted his recognition of the difficulties that have existed around this. Councillor Ottino asked the following questions:

- More information was requested on the 'pool water features' mentioned on page 48 of the report.
- Clarification was requested regarding the meaning of '3%' on page 49 of the report, and whether this referred to an increase.

- More information was requested in reference to page 51 of the report focused access to, and use of, leisure services by multicultural communities.

Councillor Rowley asked the following questions:

- In reference to page 40 of the report which detailed a reduction in usage and membership, it was asked whether the current leisure provider has confidence in the previous provider's figures and whether more anecdotal evidence could be provided to make the data more robust.
- In reference to page 14, it was queried whether issues with online transfers of membership had been resolved and whether this accounted for some of the decline in membership numbers overall.
- What work is ongoing to rectify longstanding issues with the lift at Barton Leisure Centre; specifically, who is responsible for monitoring this.
- Whether reporting on KPIs in the future could continue to focus on the number of concessionary memberships being used.

In response to Councillor Ottino, the Active Communities Manager confirmed that the reference of 3% on page 49 of the report does denote an increase.

The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure also informed Councillor Ottino that pool water features mentioned on page 48 refer to ongoing sourcing of quotations for features such as interactive panels for children.

The Active Communities Manager committed to providing more detail in response to Councillor Ottino's request regarding multiculturalism and leisure access in future reports but agreed that the service must be accessible and inclusive for all. The Committee were assured that work is ongoing to define how this can be done.

In response to Councillor Rowley, the Active Communities Manager explained that is challenging to evidence reductions in the usage of leisure facilities with the older provider as there is limited access to their data. The Committee heard a summary of the difficulties experienced with obtaining data from the previous provider and understood that officers were unsatisfied with the quality of the data available.

In relation to issues with transferring memberships, the Active Communities Manager confirmed that work has been ongoing to rectify this and deal with customer complaints; it was clarified that progress has been made. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure recognised the challenges experienced when transferring between providers but confirmed that no further issues have been experienced recently although gaps in data in the new system may have altered the future for year one, as outlined in the report.

In relation to the lift at Barton Leisure Centre, the Active Communities Manager recognised and empathised with the repeated issues that customers had experienced and explained that work has been ongoing to learn lessons from the previous provider. The Committee learned that the Council now employs a property services specialist technician who advises on maintenance; monthly meetings take place to manage maintenance governance to ensure issues are being rectified and accessibility is ensured. That officers were working closely with More Leisure to provide an effective solution to the lift at Barton Leisure Centre.

The Active Communities Manager confirmed that they can report on concessionary usage as a KPI within future reports and committed to doing so.

Councillor Jarvis requested more information on usage figures. In relation to paragraph 5 on page 40 dealing the loss of usage data, it was also asked what percentage of information was not captured as a result of the transition issue and for how long. Councillor Jarvis raised concern as to how this may have impacted the accuracy of KPI and goal setting. Finally, in relation to page 49, the accuracy of data relating to usage by the age 50+ group was questioned.

Councillor Latif left the meeting and did not return.

Councillor Miles thanked officers for the report and asked, in reference to a creche at Leys Leisure Centre, whether this would be available for use by staff as well as customers. Councillor Miles requested further information regarding the availability and consideration of healthy food and fairtrade options at leisure centre cafes, noting her concern for whether products were being produced and sourced sustainably. Finally, Councillor Miles queried whether Padel is being considered as a leisure option.

Councillor Munkonge, in response to Councillor Jarvis, explained that whilst data has been lost, it is important to focus on developing an accurate baseline figure to measure future performance against. To this end, further information can be provided in time when comparison is possible. Councillor Jarvis requested further clarification on how long usage data was not being tracked. Councillor Munkonge confirmed that comparison would be made to measure performance across the future of the 10-year contract.

In response to Councillor Miles, Councillor Munkonge explained that under the previous provider, the creche was closed and currently a new business case is being developed to support its reopening. The Committee learned that work is underway to source a budget. In relation to sourcing healthy and fairtrade café options, Councillor Munkonge explained that a balance is required, but that support exists to ensure that this is considered. The Committee were also informed that Councillor Munkonge is now the Council's representative for Fair Trade and seeks to ensure that it is considered throughout all systems, for example we're working with the County Council's Public Health to assess and advise on healthy products.

In response to queries regarding usage figures for those in the 50+ age bracket, the Contract Manager from Serco Leisure committed to reviewing this for accuracy and reporting back.

In response to Councillor Miles' question regarding cafes, the Active Communities Manager also noted that close work has been ongoing with the health system and ICB to identify healthier as well as sustainable alternatives in the leisure centre cafes and vending machines.

The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure in relation to RAG ratings, explained that programmes of additional activities for key user groups are assessed, particularly for periods such as the school summer holidays, and it is intended that a diverse range of activities is offered to ensure children are continuously connected with their local leisure centre. The popularity of Padel was recognised, and the Committee learned that a dialogue is ongoing with the Lawn Tennis Association to put together a business case to introduce provisions for Padel tennis which should come forward to members later in the year.

The Chair invited further questions.

The Chair asked, in relation to Councillor Jarvis' earlier questions, whether there could be capacity to make an educated estimate of the missing data based on data already collected to support the use of a better baseline dataset.

Councillor Mundy in relation to the assisted lifeguarding technology mentioned in the report, asked if the leisure provider and Council are currently in contract with the named technology provider, and whether consideration has been made of compliance with human rights policy and the motion recorded at Council on 24 March 2025.

Councillor Qayyum thanked officers for the report and welcomed the expansion of women's swimming lessons in Oxford. It was asked, in connection with noted health inequalities across some regions of Oxford, whether an explanation could be provided for the influence that the Council has on membership fees and the costs of activities. Councillor Qayyum also asked if prices could be lowered in certain regions of Oxford to encourage more physical activity. Finally, she asked whether under 17s can access any swim sessions at leisure centres or just allocated free sessions.

Councillor Munkonge, in response to Councillor Qayyum, provided information on the fund available to support those experiencing financial constraints as means of encouraging more physical activity and improving health inequalities. Councillor Munkonge also provided information regarding the availability of free swimming for those under 17.

The Active Communities Manager, in response to the Chair's question, confirmed that work could be done to assess whether an educated estimate could be made for the missing data by using industry benchmarks. The Committee were cautioned that the accuracy of this would not be perfect.

In response to Councillor Mundy's query, the Active Communities Manager explained that the company utilised for provision of assisted lifeguard technology is recommended by Swim England (the national governing body), and the Royal Life Saving Society and has been tried and tested. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure provided explanation of how the technology works and clarified that it is intended to save lives by supporting the lifeguards on duty to detect any bathers who may be at risk of or are drowning.

Regarding concessionary access, the Active Communities Manager detailed the reduced cost options already available to Oxford residents and explained that whilst seeking lower costs to residents, that there needs to be a balance to ensure that leisure contract is financially sustainable in the longer term.

In connection to his earlier question, Councillor Mundy thanked officers for their explanations and referred to the motion Council passed on 24 March 2025 to emphasise the need for more information on whether there is an ongoing contract with the technology provider. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure noted not being aware of an active maintenance contract as the technology was procured at the national level. As such no information could be provided during the meeting. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure committed to sourcing the relevant information and reporting back to the Committee. Councillor Miles asked whether human rights due diligence is conducted and whether there was any information on this process which could be provided. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure confirmed that human rights due diligence is conducted, and he could obtain further information to report to the Committee in the future. It was reiterated that he was not aware of any active contract.

Councillor Altaf-Khan asked, in relation to multiculturalism and ladies swimming, queried any ongoing issues with ensuring provisions of the sessions, noting issues during the period in which the leisure provider changed. The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure outlined the programme of session for ladies only swimming that exists and noted refugee groups, and Muslim based user groups who are offered allotted times. The Committee learned that it was the intention to roll these sessions out across the city. Councillor Munkonge also assured the Committee that More Leisure are actively recruiting female lifeguards.

Councillor Altaf-Khan left the meeting and did not return.

The Chair invited discussion of recommendations. Councillor Miles and Councillor Jarvis discussed a recommendation in reference to missing data and KPIs. Councillor

Ottino requested a report to update the Committee before the next annual report. The Chair supported a discussion with Councillor Miles and Councillor Mundy relating to information behind the company providing assisted lifeguarding technology to leisure centres in connection with the motion passed by Council on 24 March 2025.

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

1. **That the accuracy of the data presented within the Annual Service Plan, particularly regarding baseline usage figures and the 3% growth KPI's, be improved by utilising best estimates for the quantity of missing visits; and that the revised data be included in the update report to be brought back to the Scrutiny Committee in six months' time.**
2. **That the Council seek confirmation as to whether there is an ongoing contract between Serco and Lynxight and, if so, examine the nature of Lynxight's engagements. This should include providing further details on how human rights and ethical procurement policies are applied within the leisure service contracts, ensuring this information is published to reassure residents that these commitments are being upheld.**

Chair thanked Councillor Munkonge and the officers for the report and their time.

The Chair proposed that the Committee adjourn for a short break and return at 19.33.

The Active Communities Manager, the Leisure and Active Wellbeing Manager, The Contract Manager from Serco Leisure and Councillor Munkonge left the meeting.

The Committee resumed at 19.34.

8. Oxford Local Plan 2042 Regulation 18 Consultation Document

Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 June 2025, will consider a report requesting to approve the First Draft Oxford Local Plan 2042 (Regulation 18 Consultation) Document for consultation.

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

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

Councillor Hollingsworth presented the report, summarising that he is also an employee of Oxford Brookes University but has no declarable interests which would conflict with his involvement on the report. The Committee heard that the report is a replacement Local Plan for the previous 2040 Local Plan which experienced issues relating to housing need calculations. The current plan is overdue for replacement by one week. Councillor Hollingsworth explained in detail to the Committee that the regulation 18 consultation would be completed over this summer, and the regulation 19 consultation would be completed afterwards in order to present the next Local Plan to a Planning Inspector for approval.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Miles asked several questions:

- In relation to categories noted within the report which have experienced no change since the last Local Plan, it was asked whether reflection has been made on the policy coherence of matters such as bike parking and demand for bike parking against other council policies.
- In regard self-build, whether the six-month period noted in the report could be extended to support people taking time to secure funding.
- In relation to specialist accommodation for elderly persons and those with dementia, for example, how is the appropriate size of rooms defined.

Councillor Ottino requested clarification around how empty student accommodation is monitored, and what happens when it is identified that a property is not in use. Secondly, he raised concern with the wording of the first bullet point on page 102, in relation to ‘the delivery of certain infrastructure’, noting it as contentious.

Councillor Hollingsworth, in relation to queries relating to bike parking, explained that local policy that goes to public hearing is subject to national policy requirements and the decision of the planning inspector. As such, the Committee understood that it is necessary to strike a balance. Councillor Hollingsworth reminded Councillor Miles that the report only outlines the consultation stage proposals for the Local Plan. In regards self-build, that there can be difficulties around financing was acknowledged, but it was explained that the Council’s plan must respond to the housing shortage and must avoid leaving sites vacant for longer than necessary.

The Team Leader for Planning Policy built upon Councillor Hollingsworth’s response, noting that the current Local Plan 2036 has reduced the timeframe for self-build housing from a year to six months in response to lack of interest. In regards specialist accommodation, Councillor Miles understood that attempts to consider this within the last local plan were thrown out by the planning inspector. In response to Councillor Ottino, the Team Leader for Planning Policy explained the challenges with monitoring empty student accommodation, that planning could control the permitted use but has little control over occupancy; however in an Oxford context with such high land values, it was unlikely that sites would be left underutilised for any period of time.

Councillor Miles, in relation to HMO policy and saturation, requested clarification on whether they can remove grandfather rights for HMOs which are not performing to the required standards. She noted that the policy refers only to new HMOs and asked whether this could be extended to existing HMOs also. Additionally, Councillor Miles asked what could be done around policy HD9 and view cones and in response the housing shortage, could anything further be planned to strengthen encouragement of upwards building in Oxford City.

Councillor Hollingsworth, in regards HMO policy, explained that if something is defined in its use class as an HMO then this cannot be removed under the current planning system unless there is a change of use. In response to Councillor Miles, explanation was also provided of the policy requirements around the height of residential buildings in Oxford, how the previous Local Plan 2036 had moved in this direction with regards to provisions on height related to Carfax Tower. Councillor Hollingsworth agreed on the need for increased density which includes higher buildings and encouraged a positive view on such planning applications.

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss recommendations.

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

- 1. That the Cabinet review the cycle parking standards proposed in the draft Local Plan 2042 to ensure Consultation materials encourage more specific public feedback on this issue in alignment with the Council's wider transport policy commitments, particularly the goal to increase cycling trips within the city.**
- 2. That the Cabinet review and consider strengthening the wording of policies HD8 and HD9 in the draft Local Plan 2042 to better support appropriate densification in order to meet Oxford's housing needs whilst respecting the scale and character of different parts of the city.**

The Chair thanked the Cabinet member and officers.

Councillor Hollingsworth, the Team Leader for Planning Policy, and the Planning Policy and Place Manager left the meeting.

9. Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report

Cabinet, at its meeting on 18 June 2025, will consider a report to approve the Annual Complaint Performance & Service Improvement Report (Landlord Services) 2024/25.

Councillor Linda Smith, Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities, Kat Mayes, Customer Care & Complaints Manager, and Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager, were present to respond to questions.

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

Councillor Smith presented the report, summarising that the report contains positive and negative news. The Committee heard that ODS has made considerable progress with complaints handling which has supported a reduction in complaint numbers and increased efficiency in response rates. This was explained to be because of new technology and improved ways of working. On the Council side however, Councillor Smith noted disappointment that responses to complaints have not been as prompt as desired, but the Committee were assured that measures have been put in place to address this, such as increases in staff numbers. Despite this, the Committee understood that the quality of responses to tenancy complaints specifically had improved, and Councillor Smith thanked the Customer Care and Complaints Manager for this.

The Landlord Services Manager provided some context to the team, explaining that that the team responsible for managing complaints experienced a significant staff shortage over the last year which left only one colleague managing complaints. The Committee learned that the team has now successfully recruited two further officers.

The Customer Care and Complaints Manager outlined the content of the report noting that it is an annual requirement from the Housing Ombudsman which must be published on the Council's website. The report is for the benefit of residents and enables comparison with figures from the previous year. The Committee heard that the figures have reduced due to support from ODS complaints on the Council's behalf.

The Chair invited questions from the Committee.

Councillor Ottino queried whether information on similar performance metrics from the housing associations in Oxford is available to inform the Committee as to how the Council is performing comparably. More information on the tenancy involvement strategy was also requested.

The Customer Care and Complaints Manager explained that benchmark comparison is not possible at present as no other comparable reports have been released yet by Housing Associations. The Committee understood that once this data is acquired, the officers will assess the data and identify patterns to track at national and local levels. The Customer Care and Complaints Manager hoped that this would help in holding the Council to account and ensuring actions being taken accurately in response to tenant requests.

The Chair queried when this data comparison would be ready to which the Landlord Services Manager explained that the results are usually published in six-month blocks. As such, the next available data would be expected in late autumn and could be analysed from then onwards. It was clarified that the Council is reliant on publication dates of other organisations in order to proceed with this work.

Councillor Smith provided an update on the tenant engagement strategy, noting that a roadshow has taken place over recent months featuring pop up stalls in many public areas. The Committee heard the positive news that engagement was high and close to 200 tenants have expressed the desire to be involved in future work. Councillor Smith confirmed that the online launch would be taking place on 24 June, and many tenants will be invited to join.

The Chair invited the Committee to discuss recommendations.

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

1. That future complaints handling reports include benchmarking data from other housing providers, particularly those operating at a local level, to help assess the Council's performance in context and support continuous improvement.

The Chair thanked the cabinet member and officers.

Councillor Smith, the Care & Complaints Manager, and the Landlord Services Manager left the meeting.

10. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 26 March 2025 as a true and accurate record.

11. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair invited the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor to provide an update on the recommendations made by the Committee to Cabinet at its meeting on 9 April 2025.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor confirmed that six recommendations were made to Cabinet in April, as noted in the report, and one further from the Finance and performance Panel to the shareholder meeting in relation to ODS. Furthermore, since the Scrutiny Committee's previous meeting on 26 March 2025, the Climate and Environment Panel and Finance and Performance Panel met and made recommendations to Cabinet, as detailed in the report.

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

12. Dates of future meetings

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

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 8.20 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 1 July 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.