

To: Cabinet
Date: 17 September 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To submit the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee for Cabinet's consideration.
Key decision:	No
Lead Member:	Councillor Alex Powell, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Corporate Priority:	A Well-Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That Cabinet:
1. Considers and responds to the recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
N/A	N/A	N/A

Overview and Summary

- The Scrutiny Committee met on 9 September 2025 and reviewed the following items:
 - Community and Citizen Engagement Policy
 - Scrutiny Budget Review Group Scope
- Working Group meetings were also held to consider a range of reports:
Housing and Homelessness Working Group on 2 September 2025

- Re-procurement of Housing First Support Service
- Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy
- Housing Service Q1 Performance for 2025/26
- Annual update on Social Housing Allocations and Lettings

Climate and Environment Working Group on 4 September 2025

- Heat Network Update
 - EV Infrastructure Update
 - Local Energy Area Planning
3. Following the meetings, Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers were asked to agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations.
 4. The tables below detail the recommendations made by the Committee and its Working Groups, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 17 September 2025. Cabinet has provided a commentary on each recommendation to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
 5. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting on 9 September 2025 is available [here](#).
 6. The Committee and its Working Groups would like place the following on record:
 - The Housing and Homelessness Working Group raised concerns about the mismatch between the high demand for 1 bed homes and underrepresentation within the current stock, and unseen overcrowding in council homes. Questions were also raised around transparency and communication regarding eligibility especially for individuals in Band 5 where there is very low likelihood of being housed, and explored the potential of downsizing incentive schemes. The Working Group acknowledged recent improvements to the council website which sets out clear and honest messaging about the realities of social housing availability, and welcomed the prospect of a new programme that updates tenant household details in hopes this would help support monitoring of band placements.
 - The Committee agreed the scope and Terms of Reference within which the Budget Review Group will operate during their examination of the Council's annual budget proposals for 2026-27.
 7. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank Cabinet Members Cllr Linda Smith (Housing and Communities), Cllr Anna Railton (Deputy Leader – Zero Carbon Oxford) and Cllr Nigel Chapman (Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies) for their contributions. Scrutiny is also grateful to Nerys Parry (Director of Housing), Richard Wood (Housing Needs and Strategy Manager), Ossi Mosely (Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager), Kieran Edmunds (Rapid Rehousing Manager), Megan Woodward (Housing Options Team Leader), Laura Mountford (Allocation and Assessment Team Leader), Rose Dickinson (Environmental Sustainability Manager), Susan Briscoe (Net Zero Transition Project Manager), Alice Jones (Carbon Reduction Project Manager), Tom Hook (Deputy Chief Executive – City and Citizens' Services) and Jiajia Miao (Corporate Consultation Officer) for their participation in presenting reports and responding to questions.

Financial implications

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

Legal issues

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

Level of risk

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

Equalities impact

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

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

16. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
17. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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**Table 1 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Citizen and Community Engagement Policy 2025**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2025 concerning the Citizen and Community Engagement Policy 2025. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Policy specifically assigns locality managers a role in the dissemination of consultations, making use of their deeper understanding of each local area's needs and dynamics with the intention to tailor engagement efforts more effectively.	In part	<p>We agree that locality managers have a valuable role in tailoring engagement to the needs of local areas.</p> <p>Rather than including this level of operational detail in the overarching Policy, their role can be referenced in the project brief template, which includes a dedicated section outlining all support and resources planned for each engagement exercise (e.g. Locality Managers, Communications Team, Project Management). This will ensure their contribution is embedded in practice without overloading the Policy.</p>
2) That the Policy acknowledges and identifies busy time periods to be avoided for consultations, to ensure residents or participants have adequate opportunity to participate, particularly where the consultation topic requires more focused attention.	Yes	<p>Under the <i>Timeliness</i> principle, the Policy already states that <i>“If engagement takes place over holiday periods, the Council will assess and mitigate any negative impact on participation.”</i></p> <p>In practice, there are occasions when consultations must take place during holiday periods — for example, the Annual Residents Survey (normally run July–September, where consistency of timing ensures accurate year-on-year comparisons) and the Budget Consultation (which must align with the statutory budget cycle in late December).</p>

		<p>For these reasons, we believe the current wording in the Policy strikes the right balance.</p> <p>Where consultations do need to run during busier periods, officers will carefully assess the necessity, monitor participation closely, and take additional steps to encourage involvement.</p> <p>To further strengthen this in practice, a checkpoint on timing will be added to the project brief template, ensuring officers actively consider and, where possible, avoid launching consultations during peak holiday periods.</p>
3) That every consultation document undergoes an inclusivity check by an officer, resident panel, or elected member prior to release for readability and understandability by all audiences.	Yes	<p>We agree that accessibility and readability are essential. Officers will continue to carry out inclusivity checks (including plain English review and digital accessibility compliance).</p> <p>In practice, all consultation questionnaires are already reviewed to ensure readability and clarity. This includes checking that questions are written in plain English, that the length of the questionnaire is appropriate, and that the content is easy to follow for a wide audience. We will continue to apply this standard.</p> <p>The readability issue is usually observed more in supporting documents or policy papers that sit alongside the consultation.</p> <p>Looking ahead, we will strengthen the process by embedding it in the project brief template. Requesting officers will be asked to self-check all supporting materials and documents for readability and inclusivity before submission, with a checkpoint added in the template to make this explicit.</p>

		Where needed, we will also ask the Communications Team to provide an additional check to further support clarity and accessibility.
4) That Cabinet ensures the Policy is applied in a manner that maximises the inclusion of disabled people in the Council's consultation processes.	Yes	<p>This will be reinforced through both officer training and practical measures such as offering alternative formats, using accessible venues, and ensuring interpreters/support workers are available where needed.</p> <p>We will also add guidance re engaging with relevant community groups that can support with engagement.</p>
5) That Cabinet requests officers to undertake exploratory work to incorporate a system for ranking the importance of each consultation, and to investigate whether the use of incentives could effectively increase participation and engagement.	In part	<p>Regarding the suggestion to rank the importance of consultations, this would be difficult to implement in practice. Consultation projects vary widely in purpose, scope, and target audience — some focus on local residents on specific local issues, while others target the general public. Each consultation is equally important to its intended audience, making it challenging to compare projects and quantify "importance." Therefore, we propose continuing the current case-by-case review process, ensuring that each consultation is promoted effectively to its relevant audience.</p> <p>Regarding the use of incentives, this can be included as a checkpoint in the project brief template. However, any use of incentives must consider the project budget and potential impacts. While incentives can help boost response rates, they may also introduce bias by attracting participants who are more motivated by the incentive rather than the consultation topic itself. Careful consideration would be required before implementing this approach</p>

Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Working Group – Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Housing and Homelessness Working Group on 2 September 2025 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2025 concerning the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That Cabinet ensures the Temporary Accommodation Placement Policy incorporates a degree of flexibility to take account of extraordinary employment circumstances including those who work irregular hours or on variable contracts, in order to support fairness and further clarity.	Yes	The policy ensures that when placements are being considered that each case will be considered on its merits, having regard to employment, caring responsibilities, medical needs, and education of the household. This includes households which have people working variable hours.

Table 3 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group – Heat Network Update

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 4 September 2025 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2025 concerning Heat Network Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That social value creation is explored and embedded in the delivery of the heat network, with particular focus on mitigating the negative impacts of construction, including compensation for any disruptions to local businesses, safety concerns, damage to properties, and other community impacts, and that income generated through the network is directed toward addressing fuel poverty through measures such as insulation and energy efficiency upgrades.	Yes	We agree that the Council will explore all opportunities for social value creation and to mitigate any negative impacts of the scheme, noting that a balance will need to be struck between a) partner requirements (including social value delivery), b) the cost of heat and c) commercial viability of any heat network. Social value creation is a core work package of the due diligence work being undertaken by the DHN Partnership, chaired by Oxford City Council. All aspects of social value delivery will be explored, including those mentioned by the panel and employment opportunities etc.
2) That Council ensures there is further scrutiny specifically around the ownership models of the infrastructure under consideration for the heat network.	Yes	Delivery models, including co-investment and golden share, are being reviewed as part of the due diligence work.
3) That concerns around potential monopoly are duly noted, and that commercial arrangements include mechanisms that will ensure long-term public benefit and enable public oversight; that any profits or financial turnover generated through the network are shared with the City Council and used to directly benefit residents; and that where possible, infrastructure is retained in	Yes	We agree that the Council will explore all potential delivery models as part of the due diligence work, noting again that a balance will need to be struck between a) partner requirements b) the cost of heat and c) commercial viability of any heat network The results of the comprehensive due diligence will set out the key requirements for the City from a Heat Network.

public ownership or alternative safeguards are implemented to ensure dependency on a single private provider is prevented.		This will provide the Council and its Partners with the information on whether to proceed with the heat network option offered by 1energy.
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**Table 4 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group –
Local EV Infrastructure**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 4 September 2025 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 9 September 2025 concerning the Local EV Infrastructure. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That OX Place, as a council-owned company, ensure that EV charge points in new developments are accessible to the wider community; and that further work is undertaken to explore the use of workplace EV charging points by local residents during evenings and weekends, potentially through planning conditions.		It would be difficult to impose such a condition (or require it through Section 106 agreement), and the Council would not be in a position to monitor or effectively enforce it. There is currently no relevant policy supporting this, and the provision of EV charging points for general public use is not the responsibility of applicants, unless an applicant was volunteering to do so. This can be included in considerations for the Local Plan, however there are practical challenges with implementing such a requirement.