

To: Council
Date: 24 November 2025
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Update from the Scrutiny Committee

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update Council on the work of the Scrutiny Committee and Working Groups.
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 Council resolves to:
1. Note the work of the Scrutiny Committee and the recommendations as set out in the report.

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

Appendix No.	Appendix Title	Exempt from Publication
Appendix 1	Scrutiny recommendations and Cabinet responses	No
Appendix 2	Exempt Scrutiny recommendations for SJVG	Yes

Introduction and Overview

1. This report provides an update on the activities of the Scrutiny Committee and its Working Groups since the last update to Council on 6 October 2025. It covers the period from 1 October 2025 to 19 November 2025.
2. Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000 grants the power to the Scrutiny Committee to make reports or recommendations to the Cabinet with respect to the

discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the Executive; and on matters which affect the authority's area or the inhabitants of that area.

Update on Scrutiny Activities

3. Since the last full Council meeting, the Scrutiny Committee held ordinary meetings on 14 October 2025 and 11 November 2025 to consider a range of substantive items. In addition, a Special meeting was held on 5 November 2025 to review Oxford City Council's proposal for the local government reorganisation.

14 October 2025

- Project Approval and Delegations for Westlands Drive and Halliday Hill affordable housing scheme
- Anti-Social Behaviour Policy
- Annual Safeguarding Report

5 November 2025 – Special

- Local Government Reorganisation

11 November 2025

- Hackney Carriage Emissions Standards Report

4. The Committee also endorsed recommendations from the following Working Group meetings:

Finance and Performance Working Group – 29 October 2025

- OX Place - Annual Accounts and Dividends Declarations [SJVG]
- OX Place - Options Review [SJVG]
- Online Payments System Update

5. In reviewing the abovementioned reports, the Committee submitted 7 recommendations to Cabinet, of which 6 were agreed.
6. Cabinet considered these at its meetings on 22 October 2025, 10 November 2025 (Special) and 19 November 2025. Written commentaries were provided to inform Scrutiny of the rationale behind Cabinet's decision. There is a table summary setting out in detail the recommendations and responses, included as Appendix 1. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were made.
7. Recommendations concerning the Council's wholly-owned companies were endorsed under delegated authority by the Scrutiny and Governance Advisor, in consultation with the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. These were submitted to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group for consideration at their meeting on 6 November 2025. Further details are provided in the exempt Appendix 2.

Summary of discussions

Local Government Reorganisation

8. Scrutiny convened a Special meeting on 5 November 2025 to review Oxford City Council's Three Unitary Authorities proposal and discuss the local government reorganisation models. In discussion, the Committee focused on the importance of a model that protects local identity, keeps decision making close to communities, and can realistically support long-term service delivery. The Committee was clear that any future structure needs to be ambitious but still rooted in how people actually live and organise locally.
9. One of the key points raised related to Oxford's representation and how this could be maintained under the proposed arrangements, and within a wider Mayoral Strategic Authority framework. Noting that the adopted model must ensure both urban and rural influence are represented equitably, it was important to the Committee that Oxford's urban voice is preserved and not risk being diluted by predominantly rural structures. On this point, some members expressed concerns that the Single Unitary Authority model could blur local identity and accountability by overlooking regional differences, potentially weakening the ability to meet specific community needs and diverse demographics. They warned that this could result in missed opportunities to tailor policies and services to the differing contexts of Oxfordshire's urban and rural areas.
10. Another point raised was the pressures faced by voluntary organisations, particularly those outside Oxford and Banbury, with members exploring how the 3UA model could better support these groups. The Committee recognised that the 3UA's place-based approach would offer more local-level collaborations and also support county-level initiatives. They thought that this would help enable stronger partnerships between authorities and voluntary sector, helping to ensure smaller organisations are not left behind.
11. Touching on place-based identity, the Committee was curious how the proposed boundaries were drawn and whether thorough consideration had been given to existing community identities. To this, members were informed that boundaries had been chosen to preserve a sense of place, avoid destabilising established communities, and respect historic lines. The Committee noted that the proposed Greater Oxford boundaries broadly follow the current Green Belt which could allow local residents greater autonomy and more direct influence over how these areas develop.
12. Scrutiny examined further issues including staff transitions, job losses, and financial management associated with the reorganisation.
13. Throughout its consideration, the Committee raised points that reflected a strong desire for a model of local government that is both ambitious in scope and ground in local realities. On that basis, they agreed that the Three Unitary Authorities proposal offered the most workable, community-focused and balanced option available. Scrutiny Committee therefore agreed to recommend to Cabinet that the 3UA model be put forward as Oxford City council's preferred approach for local government reorganisation.

Hackney Carriage Emissions Standards Report

14. Scrutiny Committee considered the Hackney Carriage Emissions Standards report at their meeting on 11 November 2025.

15. Initial questions raised pertained to governance including the confusion about decision-making responsibilities, impact on the General Purposes Licensing Committee and future licensing arrangements. The Committee discussed the implications of delaying the policy, specifically the effects it would have on drivers in terms of feasibility, financially, and overall fairness. Air quality and environmental concerns were also discussed in length, including consistency of approach in alignment with the Council's Zero Carbon goals. Strong expression of interest was made in ensuring any delay is not only justified and time-bound, but also fair to those involved.
16. The Committee noted the various uncertainties surrounding the local government reorganisation, expressing that this should not prevent the Cabinet or Council from continuing to pursue strategies and policy direction already set.
17. In closing, the Committee reiterated that clear decision-making, fairness to the trade, and staying true to the Council's environmental aims must remain central to the decision on this issue.

Acknowledgements

18. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the Cabinet for the cross-party way in which the LGR proposals were developed and the opportunity benefitted to Council members to feed into the process at various points, and again discussions with Scrutiny members. With particular thanks to Councillor Susan Brown (Leader, Partnership Working), Caroline Green (Chief Executive), Mish Tullar (Transition Director), Nigel Kennedy (Group Finance Director), Bill Lewis (Financial Accounting Manager), Emma Jackman (Director of Law, Governance & Strategy) (Monitoring Officer), Lucy Cherry (Policy and Partnerships Officer), Clare Keen (Policy and Partnerships Officer), and Jonathan Malton (Committee and Member Services Manager) and all involved for their contributions in this process.
19. The Committee would also like to offer its thanks to all Council Officers, Members and Speakers who contributed to Scrutiny's work and meetings this reporting period.

Financial implications

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

Legal issues

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

Level of risk

24. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

25. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

26. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

27. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

28. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.

29. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

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