

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 2 December 2025

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Committee members present:

Councillor Powell (Chair)

Councillor Jarvis

Councillor Miles

Councillor Ottino

Councillor Stares

Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Latif

Councillor Mundy

Councillor Qayyum

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

Mish Tullar, Transition Director

Lorraine Freeman, CIL Data Analysis and Reporting Team Leader

Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager

Mariam Salawu, Senior Data Analyst and Reporting Officer

Also present:

Councillor Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working

Councillor Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture

Apologies:

No apologies were received.

71. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

72. Chair's Announcements

The Chair informed the Committee that an online training session had been scheduled on Monday 8 December in relation to consumer standards. Members' attendance was encouraged.

73. Minutes of the previous meeting

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meetings held on 11 November 2025 as a true and accurate record.

74. Addresses by members of the public

None.

75. Councillor addresses on any item for discussion on the Scrutiny agenda

None.

76. Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2024/25

Cabinet, at its meeting on 10 December 2025, will consider a report to approve the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication.

Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Culture, Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager, Lorraine Freeman, Team Leader for CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting, and Mariam Salawu, Senior Data Analyst and Reporting Officer, were present to respond to questions.

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

Councillor Hollingsworth introduced the report and provided a comprehensive summary.

Councillor Latif joined the meeting.

Councillor Miles queried the reference to a land supply of 2.8 years in the report and requested a simplified explanation of its meaning. Councillor Miles also requested expanded information on the complex set of reasons relating to why housing targets had not been met.

Councillor Hollingsworth explained that the statistic of 2.8 in the report referred to housing land supply and that it had been identified that much of Oxford's housing need could not be found within the city. The target in the Local Plan is therefore the level that can be delivered for the city, rather than the whole need. However, once a Local Plan

is more than five years old, the basis of the calculation changes and cannot be used as the target; therefore, the housing land supply this year dropped. Councillor Hollingsworth noted that this will change when a new Local Plan is adopted; the housing land supply will likely rise above 5 again. Comparable context of other local authorities was also provided to the Committee.

Councillor Mundy joined the meeting.

In response to Councillor Miles, the Planning Policy and Place Manager explained that when compiling the data, it became evident that there had been a downturn in housing delivery. The Committee heard of a range of reasons that could be contributing, however were also informed that no singular reason could be entirely responsible; instead, the downturn is the result of a complex matrix of interlinked factors including market conditions, for example. The Planning Policy and Place Manager emphasised that officers are working to make sense of these factors in order to support housing delivery.

Councillor Qayyum joined the meeting.

Councillor Rowley requested explanation for the statistics relating to housing completions in 2021, 2022 and 2023, and queried the accuracy of the statistics in paragraph 26.

In reference to her previous question, Councillor Miles also asked whether some of the reasons for the downturn in housing completion may be within the Council's control.

In response to Councillor Miles, Councillor Hollingsworth noted issues relating to the block on development relating to the Environment Agency's concerns about Thames Water's infrastructure, which has now been resolved, and section 106 agreement delays due to third-party decisions and actions. It was also emphasised that these issues are not unique to Oxford and are largely out of the Council's control. Other external influences including inflation in the cost of construction materials due to the Russian invasion of Ukraine were listed. Councillor Hollingsworth provided an explanation of the varying national requirements for affordable housing for smaller and larger development sites. The Committee heard that as Oxford is seeing fewer larger sites emerging, there is less requirement for developers to provide affordable housing units; this is out of the Council's control.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager agreed with Councillor Hollingsworth and provided the example of the large Barton Park housing development which had included significant numbers of affordable homes in previous monitoring years, but fewer this year as the site nears completion.

In response to Councillor Rowley, the Planning Policy and Place Manager also explained that the steps of the calculation in question were summarised within the covering report on page 63 of the agenda pack.

Councillor Ottino requested firstly, an explanation of the difference between section 106 funding and CIL money, and secondly, details on how CIL money is allocated to Parish Councils variably, and how distribution to councillors is managed.

Councillor Latif asked if the statistics in the report could separate out those housing sites under the 10-unit threshold for the affordable housing policy in the future to facilitate the Committee's understanding of where the Council can require affordable housing.

Councillor Hollingsworth, in response to Councillor Latif, explained that due to restrictions on what can be reported, it would be harder to disaggregate the data as requested between different reports for Cabinet and the Scrutiny Committee. However, a more specified explanation could be drafted in the future on the covering report to the Scrutiny Committee.

In response to Councillor Ottino, Councillor Hollingsworth explained that section 106 funding is specifically reserved for matters which are a requirement of planning applications. It was explained that CIL is more of a tax and is calculated based on square metres of the specified development. Members also heard that variable Section 106 requests are made, dependent on the type of development being undertaken, for example housing or schools. A summary of the debated benefits and drawbacks of section 106 funding was provided. Councillor Hollingsworth also explained that CIL money is targeted at the creation of new infrastructure or the maintenance and repair of existing infrastructure. This money is controlled via the Council who distribute a proportion of it to Parish Councils or to councillors to spend in their wards. The parameters for allocating CIL money to Parish Councils were outlined.

In response to Councillor Ottino, the Team Leader for CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting further explained that Parish Councils receive 15% of any development payments received from CIL money for development in their area. This increases to 25% where a Neighbourhood Plan is in place. Members also understood that Parish Councils are notified twice a year of the amount available to them. The Team Leader for CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting also clarified that expenditure of CIL for infrastructure projects within the City of Oxford is set via the Council's budget process and referred the Committee to further CIL guidance on the Members' webpage.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager acknowledged Councillor Latif's request for more clarity in covering reports.

The Chair queried whether section 106 money must only be used on Council-owned land, to which Councillor Hollingsworth clarified that it can be universally used on any development land.

Councillor Miles, in relation to CIL money, queried the inconsistency in how it is allocated to councillors and whether this is deemed as fair. Councillor Miles also asked what criteria are being applied within the review of CIL money. Specifically, she asked what the procedure is for distributing unallocated CIL amounts at the end of a budget year.

Councillor Hollingsworth recommended queries on budget matters be referred to Council Turner outside of this meeting.

Councillor Mundy queried a historic CIL exemption made for BMW and asked how often similar exemptions have been made.

Councillor Stares, in reference to Littlemore, asked what the expectation can be for CIL expenditure in her ward, noting that investment in the railway does not necessarily benefit local residents.

Councillor Hollingsworth explained that the allocation of CIL is determined as part of the budget setting process and investment in the railway was targeted at encouraging growth in the area to generate more money for Littlemore residents.

In response to Councillor Mundy, the Team Leader for CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting confirmed that the exemption for BMW is the only example of such a decision and explained that other instances in which exemptions may be made would include for charity relief, social housing relief, or self-build relief. The Planning Policy and Place Manager these categories of exemptions are written into regulations, meaning that relevant applications are ineligible to pay CIL.

Councillor Miles, in relation to care homes, requested views on whether Oxford City has an ageing population, and whether more could be done to incentivise developers to build necessary homes and facilities for the elderly.

Councillor Hollingsworth clarified that the question relates more to the Local Plan than the report before the Committee, but confirmed that if required, incentivisation can be designed.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager confirmed that work has been ongoing to assess the need for more care homes, and it has been considered within the new Local Plan which the Scrutiny Committee will see in early 2026. It was also explained that at present, there is not a huge demand for additional housing

for elderly populations in Oxford and the new Local Plan has been designed proportionally to this. The Planning Policy and Place Manager clarified that care homes are only mentioned within the AMR as they count towards housing completions in terms of land supply.

Councillor Stares, noting an example in her ward, asked whether consideration is being made for the need for more adaptive houses in policy, and asked whether any are being built.

The Chair asked, in relation to the H9 policy in the Local Plan, what communication is ongoing with universities to manage the demands for them expanding. The impact on student housing numbers in the city was also queried.

Councillor Hollingsworth declared an interest as an employee of Oxford Brookes University, but in response to the Chair, noted that there is very regular communication with the universities, including in relation to the Local Plan. It was also noted that the impact of students on the local area is hard to predict as it raises many broad questions, such as the impact of postgraduate students who settle in the city with their families for research purposes. The differential impact between taught and research-based students on residential situations was highlighted.

The Chair also declared that his partner is employed at Oxford Brookes University, and he was formerly an employee there.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager, in response to Councillor Stares, explained the overlap between building regulations and national guidance for enhancing accessibility and adaptability of residential properties. The Committee heard that this is integrated within the Local Plan and 15% of houses on development sites of more than 10 properties will be required to enhance the level of accessibility.

Councillor Miles queried whether CIL can be spent on biodiversity as infrastructure, to which Councillor Hollingsworth confirmed that it could be within reason, with each case requiring consideration on its own merits.

The Chair invited discussion of possible recommendations.

The Committee resolved to recommend to Cabinet:

- For Cabinet to review the reporting of housing delivered, separating out those on sites of under 10 units where the requirement for affordable housing is not triggered within the covering report for future years.
- For Officers to identify, if possible, the complex set of reasons as to why the housing completions reported are currently under the target or if not possible, explicitly state this.

- For Cabinet to request officers to investigate bottlenecks with the current processes.

Councillor Hollingsworth specifically thanked the Senior Data Analyst and Reporting Officer for her work on the report before the Committee.

The Planning Policy and Place Manager, the Team Leader for CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting, and the Senior Data Analyst and Reporting Officer left the meeting and did not return.

77. Devolution

Cabinet, at its Special meeting on 4 December 2025, will take a decision whether to endorse the submission by Oxfordshire County Council, on behalf of Oxfordshire councils, of an Expression of Interest to Government for the inclusion of the Thames Valley area in the next wave of its Devolution Programme.

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working, and Mish Tullar, Transition Director, were present to respond to questions.

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

Councillor Brown presented the report to the Committee and provided a comprehensive summary.

The Transition Director outlined connections between devolution, and Local Government Reorganisation (LGR), specifically Oxford City Council's three-unitary proposal.

Councillor Ottino queried how inclusion within a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority would be communicated to local residents as a beneficial arrangement, noting that he does not personally identify himself as being part of the Thames Valley region. Concern with how distant this identity could feel was noted.

Councillor Latif queried why Buckinghamshire is seeking to remain separate from the Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority. Clarification of the difference between LGR and devolution was also requested. Councillor Latif expressed concern over the difference in geographical scale between LGR and devolution and asked how this can be aligned.

Councillor Jarvis asked what sense there is from Government about Buckinghamshire not wishing to be part of a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority.

In response to Councillor Ottino, Councillor Brown confirmed that many conversations are ongoing between local authorities regarding the impacts of devolution and how to present it to the public. The Committee heard that a significant budget has been allocated by Government to give more powers to local areas; the potential benefits of which were highlighted. Comparable examples, such as Manchester, were also referenced. Councillor Brown noted that for areas that do not obviously fit the geographic regions, the Government may aim to use powers to ensure that no region is left out, including Buckinghamshire. In response to Councillor Latif, LGR and devolution were explained via the connections they will have to each other and the inclusion of all unitary authority leaders within the decision-making model of the Mayoral Strategic Authority. Councillor Brown outlined how the three-unitary model would best support representation of local voices within a Mayoral Strategic Authority.

The Transition Director commented on the complementarity of smaller place-based unitary authorities with Mayoral Strategic Authorities, noting the positive impacts to investment, strategic responsibility, and delivery this will bring.

Councillor Miles queried why Swindon is included within the proposal for a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority, noting that its identity fits more neatly with west country regions.

Councillor Brown clarified that Swindon proactively expressed interest for being included within a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority and provided detail on its economic context which aligns with Oxford. Its consideration within the proposed growth corridor between Oxford and Cambridge was also outlined.

The Chair queried the role of unitary authority leaders within a Mayoral Strategic Authority and asked what the governance structures would look like.

Councillor Brown clarified that Mayoral Strategic Authority governance arrangements are not yet confirmed, and this would be the next step in devolution planning from Government. The Committee heard that it would involve a mayor who makes some decisions, and a collection of local authority leaders with some decision-making powers.

Councillor Latif queried the constructs of proportionality in a Mayoral Strategic Authority decision-making structure.

The Transition Director outlined more detail on possible devolution models and confirmed that considerations of weighted voting within a Mayoral Strategic Authority would be addressed in future planning stages by Government.

Councillor Stares highlighted Oxford Direct Services (ODS) as a success story of Oxford City Council and asked if the benefits of this would be lost through devolution.

Councillor Brown clarified that entry into a Thames Valley Mayoral Strategic Authority would have no effect on ODS and how services are run locally. Local Government Reorganisation would have a larger impact on ODS, but the specifics of this are unknown at present.

The Chair requested a brief outline of some of the powers that a Mayoral Strategic Authority may hold as a result of devolution.

The Transition Director listed the examples of strategic planning, oversight of development, targets for housing, overall responsibility for environmental sustainability planning, transport, skills, and inward investment. This list was not exhaustive.

Councillor Brown referenced Manchester as an example of a Mayoral Strategic Authority having positively bringing in investment to surrounding areas.

The Committee made no recommendations to Cabinet.

Councillor Brown, Councillor Hollingsworth, and the Transition Director left the meeting and did not return.

78. Scrutiny Work Plan

The Chair requested comments on the work plan; there were none.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor informed Members that following a request for fair trade to be considered by a member of the public over previous years, the matter is being continually monitored by officers and is likely to be before the Scrutiny Committee next year.

The Chair noted that in January, the Committee will also be considering the new Local Plan.

The Committee **agreed** to the Work Plan.

79. Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations

The Chair outlined the responses from Cabinet to the Scrutiny Committee's recommendations from its last meeting, as listed within the report.

Councillor Ottino queried whether the Scrutiny Committee could make recommendations to the licensing committees.

The Committee and Member Services Manager explained that there is no formal mechanism for this, however comments could be taken to officers to make them aware of possible discussions relating to policy at the next Committee meeting.

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

80. Endorsement of Recommendations from Working Groups

The Chair reminded Members to request to enter closed session if they wished to discuss the confidential appendix.

The Scrutiny and Governance Advisor outlined the recommendations from the recent meetings of the working groups and summarised the main points of discussion, as listed within the report.

The Committee **endorsed** the recommendations and **noted** the discussions which took place at the meetings of the working groups.

81. Dates of future meetings

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

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.50 pm

Chair
2026

Date: Tuesday 13 January

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.