

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 December 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 the Cabinet:

- 1. Consider and respond** 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 2 December 2025 and reviewed the following items:
 - Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement

- Working Group meetings were also held to consider a range of reports:

Housing and Homelessness Working Group – 13 November 2025

- Housing Complaint Handling Performance (Q1 and Q2)
- Building Safety & Compliance (Q1 and Q2)
- Draft Resident Involvement Strategy 2025-28
- Decarbonisation update: Impact of Energy Efficiency Funding programmes (LAD1b and SHDF) and EPC programme

Climate and Environment Working Group – 17 November 2025

- Net Zero Tracker
- Air Quality Action Plan
- Biodiversity Strategy and Environment Act update

Finance and Performance Working Group – 26 November 2025

- Treasury Annual Report
- ODS Group Performance Report

3. 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.
4. Following the meetings, Cabinet Members, in consultation with the relevant Officers were asked to agree, agree in-part, or disagree with the recommendations.
5. The tables below detail the recommendations made by the Scrutiny for each report, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 10 December 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.
6. Recommendations relating to ODS and OxWED made by the Finance and Performance Working Group were considered by the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group at their Special meeting on 1 December 2025 and ordinary meeting on 4 December 2025.

Summaries of discussions

7. Housing and Homelessness

- **Housing Complaint Handling Performance (Q1 and Q2)**

The Working Group acknowledged the positive feedback from the Ombudsman regarding the Council's complaint handling. It noted the current backlog and sought assurance that sufficient resource is in place, with Officers confirming new staff are being trained and the backlog is expected to be cleared by the end of Q3. Members raised questions about escalation routes when officers do not respond, and highlighted the need for clear communication pathways for residents who wish to raise concerns without entering the formal complaint process.

- **Building Safety and Compliance Performance (Q1 and Q2)**

The first point noted by Members was regarding subcontracted fire risk assessors not appearing on the professional register, which was raised by

external auditors in their report to the Audit and Governance Committee. The Working Group was reassured that an internal fire assessment team has been established following recommendations from the auditors and that auditors were positive about this progress. Members also discussed the anticipated impact of Awaab's Law and the likelihood of increased reporting and resource need. Lastly, the Working Group sought clarification on stairlifts provisions and implications for vulnerable residents to whom these were provided. It was clarified that stairlift provisions for residents are not legally required under LOLER, however as a result of this oversight, the Council agreed arrangements with residents and will reassess future arrangements.

- **Draft Resident Involvement Strategy 2025-28**

A strong expression of support for the Strategy was offered, with the Working Group welcoming the significant resident influence throughout its design. The Working Group welcomed the opportunity to track that the strategy's intentions are reflected in the way policies are delivered, and any plans to strengthen feedback loop from the Tenant Board.

Other points raised included resident involvement which often intersects with other areas of work such as EPC inspections. Members highlighted the importance of making sure that feedback from residents are captured consistently and channelled effectively across workstreams, including the work of Scrutiny. The Working Group also noted the need to avoid duplication of work and to ensure resident voices are not diluted. They welcomed the confirmation that efficient governance arrangements are being reviewed with these considerations in mind.

- **Decarbonisation update: Impact of Energy Efficiency Funding programmes (LAD1b and SHDF) and EPC programme**

Discussions centred around the risk of large numbers of EPCs expiring simultaneously with Members noting the need to manage assessment cycles more evenly. The Working Group also sought clarity on progress towards EPC targets and whether the Council remains on track to reduce properties below Band C by 2030. Other concerns raised pertained to resilience and future external funding, and tenant refusals to retrofit work. It was noted that these often stemmed from disruption, health issues, or misconceptions particularly surrounding insulation and air source heat pumps, which prompted the Working Group to highlight the importance of educating residents on these topics.

There were no recommendations from the Housing and Homelessness Working Group.

8. Climate and Environment

- **Air Quality Action Plan**

The Working Group noted the Air Quality Action Plan consultation booklet has effectively incorporated previous scrutiny feedback on ensuring information for the public is clear and easily digestible.

Points were raised regarding the extent to which delivery of the AQAP may be affected by county-level policies and measures, including the congestion charge. They queried whether the document sufficiently accounted for potential inconsistencies between administration and whether these differing

positions were acknowledged. In the context of Local Government Reorganisation, the Working Group emphasised the need to maintain strong commitment to the excellent work being done, and to ensure that this positive trajectory continues. Some concerns were also noted from areas such as Woodstock Road and Hollow Way about potential displacement effects arising from temporary congestion measures, and the Group considered whether additional monitoring in these areas might be beneficial. The Working Group accepted the clarification that the 44 diffusion tube monitoring points previously assessed in relation to traffic filters align with those areas predicted to experience the most significant impacts from congestion related measures. Overall, the Working Group expressed general support for the draft Air Quality Action Plan.

- **Biodiversity Strategy and Environment Act Update**

Firstly, the Working Group wished to ensure that the newly appointed Ecologists have the resources required to meet the Council's biodiversity commitments and duties. It noted that the team is still assessing its needs and would be in a position to forecast these in due course. Members queried Section 106 allocations and whether parameters should be set, however it was understood that a deliberate decision had been taken to retain simpler guidance to avoid placing unnecessary limitations on the biodiversity team. The Working Group also discussed the robustness of enforcing biodiversity policies within the Local Plan, and the potential to link certain elements to Section 106, both of which will need to be worked out within the forthcoming Biodiversity Net Gain document to formalise the Council's approach.

The Working Group welcomed and expressed thanks to Richard Hill and Sarah Hawes, both of whom joined the Council recently as Principal Ecologists, and extended its appreciation to the wider Environment Sustainability team for their contributions to the meeting.

9. Finance and Performance

- **Treasury Management Annual Report**

There were no recommendations from the Finance and Performance Working Group.

- **ODS Group Performance Report**

Two recommendations were initially proposed to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group. However, as they related to the client function between Oxford Direct Services and the Council, they therefore fall to the Cabinet for a response, in line with the relevant schemes of delegation.

Acknowledgements

10. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank Cabinet particularly Cllr Susan Brown (Leader of the Council, Partnership Working), Cllr Anna Railton (Deputy Leader – Zero Carbon Oxford), Cllr Linda Smith (Housing and Communities) and Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (Planning and Culture) for the consistent collaborative engagement with Scrutiny.

11. Scrutiny was also grateful to Nerys Parry (Director of Housing), Bill Graves (Landlord Services Lead), Kat Mayes (Customer Care and Complaints Manager),

Toni Henderson (Corporate Fire Safety Manager), Pete Davies (Resident Involvement Manager), Juliet Nicholas (Energy and Sustainability Manager), Tina Mould (Environment Sustainability Business Lead), Pedro Abreau (Principal Air Quality Officer), James Barlow (Principal Flood Mitigation and Environmental Quality Team Leader), Richard Hill (Principal Ecologist), Sarah Hawes (Principal Ecologist), Rachel Williams (Planning Policy and Place Manager), Lorraine Freeman (Team Leader - CIL, Data Analysis and Reporting), Mariam Salawu (Senior Data Analyst and Reporting Officer) and Mish Tullar (Transition Director) for the reports presented and their participation in the work of Scrutiny.

12. Minutes of the Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2025 can be found [here](#).

Financial implications

13. Financial implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.

14. Where appropriate, any further financial implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Legal issues

15. Legal implications for the reports listed above were outlined within the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.

16. Where appropriate, any further legal implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Level of risk

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

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

Equalities impact

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

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

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

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

22. 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 – Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2025 concerning the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) 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.	Yes	We are happy to explore how additional clarity on this matter can be added to the covering report in future years.
2) 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.	Yes	The Covering Report currently states: <i>“Figure 2 below shows the cumulative projection is just under the target to meet the minimum of 10,884 dwellings to 2036 as set out in policy H1. There are likely to be a range of potential factors which have affected completion rates in recent years, these are difficult to separate out statistically, however officers are working hard to maximise opportunities to deliver housing to meet the target.”</i> We could amend this to read: <i>“There are likely to be a range of potential factors which in combination have affected completion rates in recent years, officers have explored possible explanations but these are difficult to separate out statistically and cannot be accurately isolated. However officers are working hard to maximise opportunities to deliver housing to meet the target.”</i>

3) For Cabinet to request officers to investigate bottlenecks with the current processes.	Yes	At the meeting, in response to questions about bottlenecks in the system, reference was made to the impact which legal delays and hold ups in receiving 3 rd party input into Section106 agreements can have. Officers will continue to work with external partners in exploring how these can be resolved efficiently.
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**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Climate and Environment Working Group –
Biodiversity Strategy and Environment Act Update**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Climate and Environment Working Group on 17 November 2025 and endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2025 concerning the Biodiversity Strategy and Environment Act Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That Cabinet draw on the expertise of community and voluntary groups to provide input and support the delivery of the Biodiversity Strategy; and actively inform the public about the criteria for good habitat, clearly promoting what good biodiverse habitat looks like so as to strengthen public understanding and support for practices (such as leaving verges uncut) that protect local species.	Yes	The Biodiversity Strategy will utilise input from community and voluntary groups, through creation of a steering group.

Table 3 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Finance and Performance Working Group – ODS Group Performance Report

The table below sets out the recommendations made by the Finance and Performance Working Group on 26 November 2025, initially presented to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group. The recommendations were endorsed by Scrutiny Committee on 2 December 2025 and considered by SJVG on 4 December 2025.

Following this, the recommendations concerning ODS Group Performance Report were forwarded to Cabinet and is now asked to agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) To increase the use of CCTV given that it has been the most effective measure for preventing fly-tipping.	Yes	CCTV cameras, overt and covert can be an effective tool in preventing and detecting fly-tipping. An investment in cameras, permanent signage on HRA stock where fly-tipping is a problem (usually around bin stores, alleyways and garages) and temporary signs during an enforcement operation would be useful methods to tackle these offences. This will need to be part of a detailed costed set of plans for certain HRA sites, which is what we plan to do in the next financial year.
2) That repairs of play area equipment be reverted to a delegated budget arrangement, as this model has previously demonstrated greater efficiency and addresses the backlogs in maintenance.	No	The Shareholder and Joint Venture Group has spoken to Officers. A project is underway on the clienting and commissioning of Oxford Direct Services by the council and this should be picked up by that process. To confirm, however, no delegated budget has been removed from ODS.