

To: Cabinet
Date: 21 January 2026
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

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 13 January 2026 and reviewed the following items:
 - Workforce Equality Update
 - Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045
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.

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 Scrutiny for each report, which Cabinet will consider at their meeting on 21 January 2026. Cabinet has provided commentaries to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were suggested.
5. The Committee wish to put on record:

- In discussing the proposed submission of the Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045, the Committee was minded to emphasise the importance of providing clear guidance on how planning can be designed to ensure Oxford creates child-friendly places and amenities, recognising that such practice has been adopted by other authorities. The Committee noted that children's needs should be addressed within the Local Plan policies, potentially through the Technical Advice Note. Acknowledging the current timeline for the Plan's implementation, the Committee requests that this matter be recorded and revisited in future.

6. Minutes of the Scrutiny meeting held on 13 January 2026 can be viewed [here](#).
7. The Scrutiny Committee would like to thank the Cabinet particularly Cllr Nigel Chapman (Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies) and Cllr Alex Hollingsworth (Planning and Culture) for their collaborative engagement with Scrutiny. The Committee was also grateful to Gail Malkin (Head of People), Sobia Afrida (EDI Specialist), Rachel Williams (Planning Policy and Place Manager), Sarah Harrison (Planning Policy Team Leader), and Natalie Dobraszczyk (Planning Policy Team Leader) for their work on the reports presented 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 –
Workforce Equality Update**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2026 concerning the Workforce Equality Update. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the current target for workforce representation of 17% for employees from minority ethnic groups be increased to a higher, evidence-based, figure in order to re-strengthen the Council's recruitment from these groups.	Yes	The Council has achieved its current, formal target of 16.5% and has since been working towards 17%. It is appropriate to increase the target.
2) That Cabinet fully implement an anonymised, third-party reporting system, reflecting standard practice across the public and private sectors, to enable employees to raise concerns relating to harassment, bullying, discrimination, corruption and other workplace-related issues with confidence.	Yes	The Council is currently exploring options for a service. One provider is quoting around £300 per month plus vat for the service for the Council's workforce. An internal solution would not incur extra costs but would take up staff time.
3) Acknowledging there are challenges posed by low staff numbers and reliability of available data in this area, that future workforce equality reports include a dedicated section on gender reassignment, recognising this as a protected characteristic.	Yes, in part	As this group of employees is small and hesitant about sharing personal data, we do not wish to highlight numerical data on the group but would be happy to refer to the work we are doing to support employees and acknowledge gender reassignment as a protected characteristic. Non-binary, trans and gender questioning employees would be included. A separate section may not be required but this will be considered.

**Table 2 – Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee –
Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045**

The table below sets out the draft response of the Cabinet Member to recommendations made by the Scrutiny Committee on 13 January 2026 concerning the Proposed Submission Draft Oxford Local Plan 2045. The Cabinet is asked to amend and agree a formal response as appropriate.

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) For officers to undertake a further review of the areas in Greater Leys, in particular Dunnock Way, and other sites such as Littlemore to be allocated Local Centres under Policy C1, noting their similarities to Underhill Circus.		Officers will carry out a further analysis of the list of Local Centres.
2) That the evidence-base is thoroughly examined to determine whether 10% biodiversity net gain is conclusively the most ambitious minimum the council could set.		Officers have reviewed the position and can confirm the following: The Environment Act 2021 sets a statutory biodiversity net gain (BNG) of 10%. The Planning Practice Guidance was updated last year to say that local plans should not seek a higher percentage than this statutory level 'unless justified'. To support a higher percentage we would need robust evidence to justify this approach, which would need to look at specific local need, as well as demonstrating opportunities to deliver it and looking at the impact on development viability. Because of the constrained nature of Oxford and the limited opportunities for development, and indeed for achieving BNG within the city, this is not considered to be an approach that could be justified and evidenced.
3) For officers to explore whether a higher threshold for the acceptability of loss of sports facilities could be incorporated in the Local Plan.		In the development of the Plan officers have reviewed all the green spaces in the city, and in some cases go further than the NPPF by attempting to preserve spaces in situ, because of their important functions that justify this and

		<p>make it difficult to re-provide, e.g. as a wildlife corridor or functional floodplain. Other spaces are part of the supporting Green Infrastructure network, and these spaces follow the NPPF approach that development may be justified if re-provision can be made, or if they are shown to be surplus. We do not have a surplus of pitches, so pitches in use do require re-provision. Re-provision needs to be of equivalent or better quality and capacity but not necessarily quantity, so sometimes a smaller area of pitches, or enhanced pitches elsewhere, that can provide the same level of use, may be accepted.</p>
53	4) For officers to reconsider the language in Policy C2(h) encouraging the development of city centre play amenity.	<p>The Plan is very supportive of play space and specifically in including this in our centres, for example: in Policy C2 about maintaining vibrant centres (which includes the city centre): <i>"enhancement and new opportunities for public realm and landscaping such as tree planting, including incorporation of small green spaces where people can stop, dwell, socialise and play;"</i>.</p> <p>There is policy support elsewhere in the Plan too, Policy G1: protection of green infrastructure states: <i>"Proposals impacting the following types of open space will need to be accompanied by additional evidence that demonstrates consideration of the following:...b) Parks and gardens, accessible greenspace and amenity greenspaces: i) the role of the space in supporting people to socialize, take part in informal recreation (particularly where facilities like children/youth play and outdoor gym equipment are present), or as an escape from the urban environment,"</i></p> <p>Also, in Policy G2: enhancement of green and blue infrastructure says proposals should demonstrate how they've considered: <i>"Health and wellbeing, including</i></p>

facilitating recreation and play for people of all age groups and abilities, particularly children and teenagers;"

More broadly, the City Council supports the concept of a play space in the city centre, however, without a site having been identified, there is little more the Local Plan can do to deliver it.