

To: **Scrutiny Committee**
Date: 7 April 2026
Report of: Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer)
Title of Report: Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To provide the Scrutiny Committee with a summary of the urgent key decisions taken in this municipal year.
Key decision:	No
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Partnership Working and Inclusive Economic Growth
Corporate Priority:	A Well Run Council
Policy Framework:	None

Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
1. Note the list of urgent key decisions taken between March 2025 and March 2026;

Information Exempt From Publication	
N/A	N/A

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

Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee, at its meeting on 14th January 2025, requested a list of Urgent Key Decisions taken in the current municipal year. This followed a report from the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (previously Head of Law and Governance) setting out the actions taken for reducing the amount of urgent key decisions.

7. A previous report setting out the Urgent Key Decisions in the 2024-2025 municipal year was reported to the Scrutiny Committee at their meeting on 26th March 2025. Since February 2025, the Council now publishes a weekly forward plan for all delegated Key Decisions due to be taken, which allows for the legally required 28-day notice period to start earlier.
8. All urgent key decisions included within this report have been reported to full Council in July 2025 and January 2026, as per parts 15.17 and 17.10 of the Constitution.
9. The Scrutiny Committee are asked to note the urgent key decisions taken since the previous update was presented to Committee.
10. Measures implemented have seen a reduction in urgent key decisions and the Monitoring Officer is satisfied that they are only emerging where there is a real reason for which they have become urgent. A robust challenge is put in place on each one to ensure that they are only brought forward where strictly necessary.

Local Government Reorganisation – Interim Response to Government

2. This decision, taken by Cabinet at their meeting on 19 March 2025, was to submit Oxford City Council's response to the Government's Local Government Reorganisation. The deadline was 20 March 2025 and had to coincide with other responses from local authorities in Oxfordshire.
3. As this was a response to a consultation, the decision was not considered Key, however as per section 17.1 of the Constitution, all resolutions by Cabinet are subject to a call-in period.
4. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 20 February 2025 to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution, due to the deadline to submit the response to Government and the significant amount of work that was required in order to finalise the submission on the part of the Council, including coordination with neighbouring authorities.
5. Alternative Options Considered – to keep the call-in period, which was concluded after the deadline for submission to Government. This is not considered appropriate because Oxford City Council wouldn't have been able to submit a joint submission to the Government alongside the Oxfordshire Councils and West Berkshire of an interim plan for Local Government Reorganisation and including three initial proposals; and to agree the Council's preferred option for the creation of three unitary councils.

OxWed LLP Funding Arrangements

6. The decision, taken on 27 March 2025, the Group Finance Director to agree a follow-on loan agreement for existing and future loans to OxWed LLP.
7. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 25 March 2025 to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution.
8. Oxwed LLP is a partnership between Oxford City Council and Nuffield College Developments 1 Limited.
9. The partnership's purpose is to facilitate the development of land held by the partnership in the Oxpens area of the City.

10. There is an existing loan agreement in place which terminates on 31st March 2025. It is therefore necessary to agree a new loan agreement in order to allow Oxwed LLP to continue with the development proposals.
11. The background to and key terms of the agreement were agreed by Cabinet on 5 February 2025. This decision is therefore to agree to a loan agreement in accordance with those terms.
12. This decision did not result in any additional financial commitment beyond that already agreed by Cabinet and Council in providing loans to Oxwed LLP. Any additional loans beyond those already agreed would only be provided in line with separate Cabinet and Council approval.
13. Reasons for decision – the existing loan agreement ends on 31 March 2025 and a replacement loan agreement is required.
14. **To sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street**
15. The decision, taken on 2 May 2025 was to sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street.
16. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 25 April 2025 to remove the call-in period under section 17.9 of the Constitution owing to the need to progress the off market sale at pace in order to secure the transaction.
17. The reason this was taken as an urgent decision was due to the tight timescales for completion of the sale within 30 days, which, if not progressed, would leave the Council with a potential problematic property to manage in the future, with the possibility of high void costs and maintenance liabilities.
18. Alternative Options Considered – The alternative option is to not proceed with the sale. It is believed that an offer of this level would not be forthcoming from another purchaser due to the nature of the purchaser being a neighbouring freeholder and viewed as a “special purchaser” and the Council has a duty to secure the best value for the disposal of the land.

Approval of National Homelessness Property Fund 1 resolution

19. The decision, taken on 8 December 2025 was for the Director of Housing to approve the National Homelessness Property Fund 1 resolution, confirming the extension of the fund to 30th of April 2026 to be signed by the Director of Housing Services on behalf of the Council as a limited partner of the Fund and to authorise the entering in to of any required agreements on behalf of the Council required to give effect to the resolution, subject to legal review.
20. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 8 December to remove the requirement of the 28-day notice period under section 15.17 and call-in period under section 17.10 of the Constitution.
21. In July 2025 Cabinet approved the moving of the Council’s investment of £10m in National Homelessness Property Fund 1 (HNPF1) which was due to expire, into a new “evergreen” property fund, and gave necessary delegations to the Director of Housing to enable this reinvestment.
22. . As of December, the new fund was not yet ready, with legal work ongoing, so Resonance as managers of the fund asked all investors to support a resolution to extend the current fund until April 2026 to give more time.

23. Without taking this step, the Council would have been unable to reinvest in line with the decision of Cabinet on the 9 July 2025, once a new fund is ready and established.
24. Reasons for Decisions – On this basis the report therefore recommends to the Director of Housing to support this resolution to enable the extension, agreeing to enter into any required agreements to facilitate it. Without an extension the fund would close, risking the Council's £10m investment and the continued operation of the homes to house formerly homeless families.

Purchase agreement of land situated at The Bungalow Sandy Lane, OX4 6LL

25. The decision, taken on 18 December 2025 was for the Cabinet Member for Housing and Communities to approve the freehold purchase of the twelve (12) newly constructed affordable residential units to be constructed at the property known as The Bungalow, Sandy Lane, Oxford (OX4), for the sum of £2,820,000, and to be held in the Housing Revenue Account and provided as affordable housing at Social Rent tenure and to approve entering into all necessary agreements to facilitate the acquisition of the Property, including the purchase agreement, transfer deed, and any ancillary documents with the Seller (freehold owner). The acquisition comprises of 12 newly constructed affordable residential units, which will be managed through Oxford City Council's Housing Revenue Account (HRA) and delivered as Social Rent tenures.
26. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 8 December to remove the requirement of the 28-day notice period under section 15.17 and call-in period under section 17.10 of the Constitution.
27. A report was presented to Cabinet on the 17 April 2024 which provided delegation as follows:
- “the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Housing; the Head of Financial Services; and the Head of Law and Governance to agree sites and enter into agreements and contracts relating to the spend of Retained Right to Buy Receipts, for the provision of additional affordable housing into the Housing Revenue Account, within this project approval”.
28. The report did not name this Property or provide certainty around the purchase details. This Property therefore falls outside the scope of the original approval and there is a need to have a decision in order to enable the agreements to be entered into.
29. The landowner wished to deliver the housing on site directly, though the Council has asked if they would be willing to sell it undeveloped they have confirmed that they are not willing to do so and wish to undertake the construction themselves.
30. The site has planning permission and, under the s106 agreement relating to that permission, the site is restricted to be developed and provided as Affordable Housing only, with an indication therein that the Council may be the ultimate owner of the provided accommodation. The developed Property cannot be sold on the open market as a result of the permission, and the s106 sets requirement that the 12 newly constructed units must be held by the Council or a Registered Housing Provider.
31. The risk to not proceeding would be for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to not secure 12 x newly constructed units, at Social Rent to alleviate pressures from the

General Needs Housing Register and prevent delivery of a new affordable housing opportunity on a parcel of land that is not allocated in the Local Plan

32. Alternative Options Considered – the risk to not proceeding would be for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) to not secure 12 x newly constructed units, at Social Rent to alleviate pressures from the General Needs Housing Register and prevent delivery of a new affordable housing opportunity on a parcel of land that is not allocated in the Local Plan.

Replacement of Chillers at Oxford Ice Rink

33. The decision, taken on 22 December 2025 was for the Cabinet Member for a Healthy Oxford to approve the proposal that Serco Leisure Operating Limited (incumbent operator) carry out the replacement of the chillers; at the Ice Rink, agree that the Director of Property & Assets, in consultation with the Group Finance Director, Director of Law, Governance and Strategy and the Lead Cabinet Member, approves and finalises the mechanism and documentation required to implement the replacement of the chillers at the Ice Rink within the approved budget and approve spend of up to £1.5m, to be vired from existing budget lines within the capital programme.
34. The Chair of the Scrutiny Committee was consulted on 15 December 2025 to remove the requirement of the 28-day notice period under section 15.17 and call-in period under section 17.10 of the Constitution.
35. The Council entered into a new Leisure Operator Contract (“LOC”) with Serco in 2024. Under the terms of the contract 3 of the centres are let on a full repairing and insuring basis, with Serco picking up all repairs and maintenance and capital lifecycle replacement. In respect of the Ice Rink and Ferry Leisure Centre, Serco as operator are liable for the first £100k of the cost of capital lifecycle replacement with the Council responsible for anything over and above the £100k threshold.
11. The last full condition survey on the Ice Rink was undertaken in 2018 with an update undertaken as part of the dilapidations in 2023. While it was known that the chillers were approaching end of life, it had been anticipated they would last until 2032. Unfortunately, they failed earlier and require replacement as they cannot be repaired. Without fully functioning chiller units the Ice Rink would not be able to operate. The Council has a legal obligation under the LOC to replace the failed chillers. The cost to replace was £1.5m with the Ice Rink running on temporary plant at the cost of £1,600 per week. Although Serco has funded the first £100k of costs this then fell to the Council; As such it was recommended that the chillers were therefore replaced as quickly as possible. The LOC provides that the Council can carry out the replacement itself or can agree with Serco as the Operator under the LOC to carry out the work on behalf of the Council.
36. The chillers will need to be designed and ordered, meaning 4-6 months before they are installed and able to service the Ice Rink. The cost of the temporary kit is not insignificant, and a Single Member Decision was sought to reduce the number of weeks the rink is dependent on temporary equipment.
37. Two alternatives were considered, the first being to continue running the Ice Rink on temporary kit until the outcome of the Ice Rink project is known. This has been discounted as is cost prohibitive.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

38. There are no implications of Local Government Reorganisation arising from this report.

39. Where appropriate, any implications relating to LGR were reviewed when considering the decisions using the linked guidance from Government: [Financial decisions before local government reorganisation - GOV.UK](#)

Financial implications

40. There are no financial implications arising from this report.

41. Financial implications for each of the Urgent Key Decisions have been outlined above, and the Group Finance Director (Section 151 Officer) was consulted before each decision was taken.

Legal issues

42. There are no financial issues arising from this report.

43. Legal issues for each of the Urgent Key Decisions have been outlined above, and the Director of Law, Governance and Strategy (Monitoring Officer) was consulted before each decision was taken.

Report author	Jonathan Malton
Job title	Committee and Member Services Manager
Service area or department	Law, Governance and Strategy
Telephone	01865 602767
e-mail	jmalton@oxford.gov.uk

Background Papers:

- 1 [Agenda for Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 14 January 2025, 6.00 pm | Oxford City Council](#)
- 2 [Agenda for Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 26 March 2025, 6.00 pm | Oxford City Council](#)
- 3 [Agenda for Cabinet on Wednesday 19 March 2025, 6.00 pm | Oxford City Council](#)
- 4 [Decision - Oxwed LLP Funding Arrangements | Oxford City Council](#)
- 5 [Decision - To sell the freehold title of 64-65 Cornmarket Street | Oxford City Council](#)
- 6 [Decision - Approval of National Homelessness Property Fund 1 resolution | Oxford City Council](#)
- 7 [Decision - Purchase agreement of land situated at The Bungalow Sandy Lane, OX4 6LL | Oxford City Council](#)
- 8 [Decision - Replacement of Chillers at Oxford Ice Rink | Oxford City Council](#)