

To: Council
Date: 13 July 2026
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Update from the Scrutiny Committee – July 2026

Summary and recommendations	
Decision being taken:	To update Council on the work of the Scrutiny Committee and it's 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

Appendix 2 to this report is deemed exempt from publication under Schedule 12A paragraph 3 (Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)) of the Local Government Act 1972.

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

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on the activities of the Scrutiny Committee and its Working Groups since the last update to Council on 24 March 2025. It covers the period from 19 March 2026 to 1 July 2026.

Working Group Arrangements for 2026/27

2. The Committee met for the first time in 2026/27 municipal year on 9 June 2026 and agreed to establish three Working Groups to focus on key areas of Council activity. Each working group was assigned remits aligned with the Council's strategic priorities. Membership and Chair appointments were confirmed as follows:

Finance and Performance Working Group (4 members): Cllr Christopher Smowton (Chair), Cllr James Fry, Cllr James Thorniley and Cllr Ian Yeatman

Housing and Homelessness Working Group (4 members): Cllr Rosie Rawle (Chair), Cllr Lizzie Diggins, Cllr Roz Smith, and Cllr Anne States

Climate and Environment Working Group (4 members): Cllr Chris Jarvis (Chair), Cllr Louise Upton, Cllr Katherine Miles and Cllr Judith Harley

3. The Budget Review Group was reconstituted to be given the task of examining the Council's annual budget proposals for the following year. The findings of all Working and Review Groups will be reported to the Scrutiny Committee accordingly.

Update of Activities

4. Since the last full Council meeting, the Committee held three meetings, with two of the meetings on 7 April 2026 and 30 June 2026, considering a range of substantive items:

7 April 2026

- Watercourses and Ditches
- Review of Ward Member Budget and Community Infrastructure Levy Councillor Applications
- Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update 2025-2026

30 June 2026

- Private Sector Housing Enforcement Policy
- Annual Review of the Council of Sanctuary Framework

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

Finance and Performance Working Group – 26 March 2026

- Integrated Performance for Q3 2025/26
- OX Place Financial Business Plan, Development Sites update and Period 9 Monitoring report [SJVG]

Housing and Homelessness Working Group – 31 March 2026

- Housing Performance 2025/26
- Selective Licensing Year 3 update

Climate and Environment Working Group – 1 April 2026

- Social Housing EPCC update
- Local Area Energy Planning update

Finance and Performance Working Group – 16 June 2026

- OX Place Monitoring April (P1) [SJVG]
- OX Place Development Sites Updates [SJVG]
- OX Place Reserves Policy [SJVG]
- OX Place Dividends Policy [SJVG]
- OX Place Draft 2026/27 Budget [SJVG]
- OX Place Draft year-end Position pre-audit [SJVG]

Housing and Homelessness Working Group – 24 June 2026

- HRA Policies [Report for Cabinet and Council]
- Housing Services Performance Report Quarter 4 and Resident Engagement “You Said, We Did” Report Quarter 4 2025-26 [Commissioned Report]
- Housing Consumer Standards Improvement Plan 2026-27 [Commissioned Report]
- Housing Work Programme Review [Commissioned Report]

6. Cabinet considered 22 Scrutiny recommendations across the various aforementioned items during its meetings on 7 April 2026, and 30 June 2026, providing commentary on each to inform the Committee of the rationale behind its decision. Of the which, 15 were agreed, 1 partially agreed, 1 not agreed. Cabinet did not indicate its position on 5 recommendations, providing only a written commentary.
7. 2 recommendations were made to the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group at their meeting on 22 April 2026. A further 2 recommendations were due at the cancelled Shareholder meeting on 25 June 2026; these are awaiting responses and will be reported in a future update to Council.
8. Table summaries of all Cabinet and Shareholder recommendations and responses for this reporting period are included as appendices. No table was produced for items where no recommendations were made.
9. Minutes of relevant meetings are provided below as hyperlinks:
 - [Scrutiny Committee 7 April 2026](#)
 - [Scrutiny Committee 9 June 2026](#)
 - [Scrutiny Committee 30 June 2026](#)

Summary of discussions

Urgent Key Decisions End of Year Update 2025-2026

10. The Scrutiny Committee considered the end of year report summarising all urgent key decisions that have been taken in the 2025/26 municipal year and noted an improved procedures for ensuring only time sensitive decisions were taken using the urgency routes as listed in the Constitution.

Integrated Performance for Q3 2025/26

11. The Finance and Performance Working Group reflected that delivery performance has not aligned with current optimism bias assumptions and suggested a more realistic starting point may be needed, with scope to adjust as performance improves. There was also a clear view that recruitment and retention pressures currently reflected across multiple services should be recognised as a single corporate risk to better capture their scale and impact. In addition, concerns were raised that existing budget provision for damp, mould and retrofit works underestimates the likely ongoing demand. Members therefore emphasised the need for more realistic medium-term planning assumptions to avoid repeated in-year budget adjustments.

Housing Performance 2025/26

12. The Housing and Homelessness Working Group reflected on the positive progress made over the past year in relation to the Council's housing offer and performance against key targets. Members noted in particular the development of the tenant strategy and look forward to reviewing how this is put into practice in future reporting. The Working Group also recognised the successes of the Selective Licensing scheme and was fully supportive of the ongoing work that the council is doing in this area including driving up standards in the private rented sector and ensuring tenants are better protected.

Social Housing EPCC update

13. The Climate and Environment Working Group noted the updates on Social Housing EPC particularly the work being undertaken to identify and replace gas boilers with air source heat pumps. Members supported this. They felt the council could be an exemplary authority and accelerate the rollout of the air source heat pumps in social housing properties to move away from fossil-based technologies and make full use of newer, more sustainable technologies available. It's view that the implications of AI require more careful consideration across a range of council functions, but particularly in regard to the Citizen Experience Strategy.

HRA Policies

14. There were questions around the Lifting Equipment and Lifting Operations Policy regarding the order of work and subsequent timescales for it to be completed. The Working Group were told the priority would be to rescue individuals stuck in lifts and then the other timeframes would ensure the securing and fix of the lift, depending on specifics determined by the contactor. Any defined targets for repairs were not currently proposed as the policy was proposing alternative measures to this.
15. There was a request to link with the complaints procedure, but this policy was seen as a preventative approach, with a monitoring mechanism linked to the complaints and wider health and safety systems.

16. Regarding the Complaints Policy, there were questions around complaints received by social media from residents, which would need to be formally submitted for processing. The Working Group were told the policy had been drafted with expectations of social media trends, meaning there could be an increase in complaints, but there was not a significant issue at present.
17. Referring to stage 2 escalation for complaints, there were queries if a full response would be received within specified 20 working days, as set out by the Housing Ombudsman Service. Officers noted that they usually respond quicker than specified timescale, but always consider the associated risks, health and safety concerns, disrepair, vulnerability, repeated service failures before responding. The Housing Ombudsman Service requests there are annual reports published, and the quarterly Residents' Complaints Panel, which reports to Tenant and Leaseholder Board.
18. There were comments regarding the work contracted to Oxford Direct Services (ODS) and noted the related complaints were on a negative trajectory for some. Officers noted that the policy outlined an independent oversight from the Council for ODS complaints, referring to guidance from the Housing Ombudsman Service and resident feedback. It was noted ODS would only be responsible for stage 1 complaints, and the Council would process any complaints escalated.
19. Regarding the Voids Policy, there was a suggestion to link mental health support where a property becomes void and requires major work. Officers noted it was not yet referred to within the policy, but the current processes lend to considering community impact and exceptional void impacts.

Housing Services Performance Report for Quarter 4

20. There were positive comments around the compliance of safety check rates along with the value and presentation on the report.
21. There were comments on the damp and mould reporting and links to access issues and resource pressures. It was recognised that there was a period where additional resource was required to clear the backlog, which has since been achieved. However, the Working Group were made aware this could increase again but Officers were streamlining processes to effectively manage it and receiving data and information to predict trends and be more proactive, working in partnership with ODS.

Resident Engagement "You Said, We Did" Report Quarter 4 2025-26

22. There were comments on the positive value of the report and on the responses from the residents. It was noted that not all policies have been approved by Council, but the tenant satisfaction measures and the perceptions of the Council as a landlord had seen a significant improvement in recent months.

Housing Consumer Standards Improvement Plan 2026-27

23. The Working Group commented on the quality of the report but noted a delay for the health and safety internal audits. It was noted that the initial target dates did not consider the resulting actions from the audit.
24. There were also comments about the next phase of implementing feedback within the next steps of the improvement plan, including engagement with tenants. It was commented that feedback is continually collected and actioned, with communication

actions being embedded within the resident engagement strategy action plan and a focus on how to improve communications with residents in terms of their needs.

Acknowledgements

25. The Committee would like to thank the Cabinet Members for their contributions. They were also grateful to invited guests and Council Officers for their hard work and presentation of the reports, as well as answering questions.
26. The Chair and the Committee would also like to thank the continuing work of Celeste Reyeslao (Scrutiny and Governance Advisor), Hannah Carmody-Brown (Committee and Member Services Officer), Brenda McCollum (Committee and Member Services Officer) and Uswah Khan (Committee and Member Services Officer) for their support for the scrutiny function of the Council during this reporting period. Thanks are also due to Jonathan Malton who has recently provided extensive support to the Committee in addition to his other duties.

Financial implications

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

Legal issues

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

Level of risk

31. Risk Registers, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
32. Where appropriate, the risk register was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Equalities impact

33. Equalities Impact Assessments, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
34. Where appropriate, the Equalities Impact Assessments was reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Carbon and Environmental Considerations

35. Consideration for Carbon and Environmental impacts, where appropriate, were linked to the reports presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Groups.
36. Where appropriate, the Carbon and Environmental impacts were reviewed when considering the recommendations.

Implications of Local Government Reorganisation

37. Implications of Local Government Reorganisation for the reports listed above were outlined within the report when presented at Scrutiny Committee or Working Group.
38. Where appropriate, any further implications were reviewed when considering the recommendations using the linked guidance from Government: [Financial decisions before local government reorganisation - GOV.UK](#)

Report author	Jonathan Malton
Job title	Committee and Member Services Manager
Service area or department	Law, Governance and Strategy
Telephone	07485 396185
e-mail	jmalton@oxford.gov.uk

This page is intentionally left blank