



**Cabinet  
Tuesday, 17 June 2025**

**ADDENDA 1- Scrutiny Reports**

**7. Reports from Scrutiny Committees (Pages 1 - 36)**

Cabinet will receive the following Scrutiny reports:-

Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:-

- a) Report of the Virtual School – attached
- b) Update of Children's Homes – attached
- c) Home to School Transport Policy – Cabinet pro forma attached

Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:-

- d) Local Enterprise Partnership Integration – attached
- e) Business Management and Monitoring Report – attached

Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:-

- f) Report of the Transport Working Group – in agenda pack
- g) s.106 Improvement Project - in agenda pack
- h) Rail Strategy – attached

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## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 June 2025**

#### **– The Virtual School Report of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. At its meeting on 28 March 2025, the Committee considered a report providing an evaluative account of the work of the Virtual School from September 2023 to August 2025, being the statutory annual report of the Virtual School. The report also provided the Committee with an update to the Committee on the extended responsibilities laid on the Virtual School as well as ones that were anticipated to come into force under new legislation.

4. The Committee was grateful to the then Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services, then Cllr John Howson, and to Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director for Education and Inclusion, and Clare Pike, Acting Headteacher of Oxfordshire Virtual School, for attending to present the report.

## **SUMMARY**

5. The Cabinet Member for Children, Education, and Young People's Services introduced the virtual school report and shared positive feedback from the February 2024 Ofsted inspection, praising the school's ambition and vision. Concerns about challenges faced by children in care were raised, particularly with in-year school admissions. The Cabinet Member voiced his support for the bill proposing local authorities handle in-year admissions.
6. The Acting Headteacher of Oxfordshire Virtual School presented the report, outlining work done between September 2023 and August 2024. She described the core duty of promoting education for children in care and care leavers, and extended duties for previously cared-for children, children with a social worker, and children in kinship care. Achievements included reducing school move times, improving educational outcomes, and increasing university attendance and graduation rates among care leavers.
7. Members raised questions about co-production in personal education plans for children in care and the awareness of school governors; suspension statistics; the relational schools programme; EHCP transitions; reintegration; the Department for Education's changes being implemented around in-year admissions.
8. The Committee makes two recommendations – one about increasing awareness and support and the other about exclusions.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9. The Committee is aware that local authorities are under a duty under s.10 of the Children Act 2004 to make arrangements to promote cooperation between relevant partners with a view to improve the well-being of children in their area. This includes Governing Boards. Governors, therefore, have a key responsibility for looked-after children as well as previously looked-after children. With the Council, they are the 'Corporate Parent' of the children we care for.
10. The Committee commended the efforts made to encourage and ensure that governors knew the number of children in care in their schools and that there was an awareness of the need to monitor their educational progress. The work of the Virtual School is vital in that and the support the Virtual School can provide to governing boards is considerable.

11. Similarly, social workers need to understand the interplay between the Virtual School and Governing Boards and the roles of the latter.
12. The Committee heard that training for governors was being reviewed that they were encouraged to attend relevant sessions with governance leads addressing non-attendance.
13. The Committee is strongly of the view that improving and enhancing understanding of governors' responsibilities for looked after children is an essential task of the Council as it works with them. An essential part of that is promoting and highlighting the work of the Virtual School with both governing boards and social workers.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council should continue to highlight the work of the virtual school with governing boards and social workers to ensure they are well-informed and engaged in supporting the education of children in care.***

14. The second recommendation relates to the level of detail in the report. In discussion in Committee, members interrogated the suspension statistics, noting that some school might favour internal exclusions or 'rest days' for children instead of formal, recorded exclusions. The Acting Headteacher agreed that the suspension statistics were not as detailed as they might be. The Committee explored this with the Acting and Headteacher and established that further enquiries into how some schools might be 'masking' exclusions.
15. Given the importance to children in care of stability, and the detrimental impact on them of not being in school, the Committee considers that attention should be paid to this concern and that, in order to be able to monitor and scrutinise this issue, the Council should ensure that, in future annual reports, there should be more granular data regarding exclusions.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council, in subsequent annual reports of the Virtual School, should report in more detail on exclusions including informal internal processes.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

16. It will be for the 2025/2026 Committee members to decide whether or not to consider next year's report.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

17. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.'

18. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Kim Sawyer  
Interim Head of Legal and Governance

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Richard Doney  
Scrutiny Officer  
[richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

June 2025

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

**Issue:** **The Virtual School**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** **17 June 2025**

**Response to report:**

*Enter text here.*

**Response to recommendations:**

| Recommendation  | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. That the Council should continue to highlight the work of the virtual school with governing boards and social workers to ensure they are well-informed and |  |   |

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

|  |  |  |
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| engaged in supporting the education of children in care.   |  |  |
| 2. That the Council, in subsequent annual reports of the Virtual School, should report in more detail on exclusions including informal internal processes. |  |  |



## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 June 2025**

#### **– Update on Children’s Homes Report of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. At its meeting on 28 March 2025, the Committee considered a report providing an update on Council-maintained children’s homes in Oxfordshire.
4. The Committee was grateful to the then Cabinet member for Children, Education, and Young People’s Services, then Cllr John Howson, and to Lisa Lyons, Director of Children’s Services, Jean Kelly, Deputy Director for Children’s Social Care, and Charlotte Davey, Assistant Director – County

Services, for attending to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions..

## **SUMMARY**

5. The Cabinet Member introduced the topic of children's homes, explaining the collaboration with the Department for Education (DfE) to increase the number of small, family-like children's homes in Oxfordshire. He highlighted the benefits of these homes in providing a more personal and supportive environment for children.
6. The Assistant Director providing an update on the development of new children's homes, detailing the progress of each of the four, and the Assistant Director summarised the financial aspects, noting that the homes were coming in on budget with any under-budget savings being partially returned to the DfE.
7. Members raised questions about timeframes for getting homes registered; the number of children in unregistered placements (noting that the Council used only registered placements); intensive support available; private provision and planning; potential expansion of the children's homes initiative. Recruitment was also discussed as were out of county placements and the cost differences between county-run homes and private sector care.
8. The Committee makes only one recommendation and that relates to the length of the registration period of new homes with Ofsted.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

9. One of the difficulties in opening new children's homes is the time it takes for that home to be registered with Ofsted. Until that registration is complete, the Council cannot place children in the home. The Committee recognises that Ofsted registration is necessarily detailed and thorough but it does not follow that it should be overly complex or take a long time. The Committee was told that one of the main factors in the delay of opening the Council's new homes even once built has been the onerousness of the Ofsted registration process. The Committee agrees with the then Cabinet member that it would be helpful to the Council as Corporate Parent and as the organisation running children's homes were Ofsted to work to reduce the length of time that process takes.
10. The Committee was advised that the process had seen some improvements. Whilst, in 2023, the timeframe was around 19 weeks from the point of having all necessary paperwork ready, this had reduced to approximately 12 weeks in 2025. Nonetheless, it could still take longer in some cases, owing to the complexity of the process, and also the requirement to have a registered manager and staff in place before one can apply for registration.

11. The Committee welcomes the fact that the average waiting time for the completion of registration has reduced but considers that it could and should be even shorter. Ultimately, a shorter but still thorough registration process is for the good of the children we care for. The Committee therefore calls on the Council to impress upon Ofsted the need to reduce the time it takes to complete the process of registration. The Committee would consider it appropriate for this to be done by Leader of the Council or by the relevant Cabinet member writing to Ofsted on behalf of the Council to set this out.

***Recommendation: That the Council should encourage Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible and thereby expedite the process of placing children in registered settings.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

12. It will be for the 2025/2026 Committee members to decide whether or not to receive a further update on children's homes but it is anticipated that it will consider other matters relating to children's social care.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

13. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
14. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Kim Sawyer  
Interim Head of Legal and Governance

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|--------------------|---|
| Annex:             | Pro-forma Response Template   |
| Background papers: | None  |
| Other Documents:   | None  |
| Contact Officer:   | Richard Doney<br>Scrutiny Officer<br><a href="mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk">richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a> |

June 2025

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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

**Issue:** **Update on Children's Homes**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** **17 June 2025**

**Response to report:**

*Enter text here.*

**Response to recommendations:**

| Recommendation  | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected) |
|---|--|---|
| That the Council should encourage Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible and |  |   |

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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| thereby expedite the process of placing children in registered settings. |  |  |
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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

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**Issue:** **Home to School Transport Policy**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** **Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** **17 June 2025**

**The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee met on 13 June 2025 and agreed the following recommendations. A report explaining the Committee's rationale will be submitted to the next Cabinet.**

### Response to recommendations:

| Recommendation  | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. That the Council should work at pace to organise personal transport budgets with |  |   |

<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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| appropriate flexibility to take account of individual circumstances.  |  |  |
| 2. That the Council should ensure regular review of the policy is to mean 'annual', subject to legislative changes. |  |  |



## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 June 2025**

## **Local Enterprise Partnership Integration Update Report of Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered an update report on the progress of Local Enterprise Partnership's integration into the Council at its meeting on 04 April 2025.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, and Nigel Tipple, LEP Chief Executive, for preparing and introducing the report, and for attending to answer questions.

## SUMMARY

5. The Leader of the Council introduced the report on the integration of the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) into the County Council, noting that an interim business plan for 2025/26 had been approved which aligned with the Council's strategic objectives. The Leader also noted a new board had been formed, inviting former LEP board members to join the Economic Partnership Board. The Leader also informed the Committee that the LEP had been renamed Enterprise Oxfordshire (EO) as part of this integration.
6. The LEP Chief Executive confirmed the transition as effective from 1 April, 2025, and assured continued operation under the new name. He highlighted maintaining existing programmes, securing government funding, aligning with Council priorities, and appointing an independent business chair for EO's board and formation of the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership Board as EO's key areas of activity following its integration.
7. Issues explored by the Committee included the suitability and cost of the governance arrangements, the locus of financial liabilities relating to the LEP's activities following the integration, and the interface of the work of the LEP and forthcoming changes to local government in the form of the development of new strategic mayoral authorities.
8. The Committee makes one recommendation, suggesting that there is greater monitoring, awareness and transparency over financial risks relating to the Council's incorporation of the LEP. Its discussions also highlighted that around some of its questions – the suitability of its governance arrangements and the effectiveness of integrating the LEP into the Council's wider functions – there had been too little activity to make an informed determination. As such, the Committee's 2024/25 membership hopes that the 2025/26 Committee will reconsider the latter, and that Audit and Governance will consider the former.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

9. The following is provided as an 'observation' insofar as the Committee does not intend to invoke the legal formalities and duties on Cabinet to make a formal response in the way it would were this to be a recommendation. However, it does involve a request for action, which it hopes will be taken on board.
10. Whilst the Committee valued receiving an update on the progress, some aspects of the LEP's integration were not as far progressed as had been envisaged when the item was originally presented to the Committee in July 2024. Notably, the Strategic Economic Plan was originally expected to be developed between April and September 2024 'to be presented to Cabinet later in 2024/25' but was delayed. The delay in developing this core document did mean there was less for the Committee to engage with, meaning it is likely this will return in the new civic year.

11. Another area members of the Committee sought to discuss but could not as fully as they wished for lack of examples to explore was the suitability of the governance of the LEP. There was a degree of scepticism expressed over whether the governance system adopted optimised democratic engagement, transparency and flexible decision-making. Concerns over additional costs were allayed at the meeting. As a corporate service, this could be reviewed by the Committee at the same time as its review of other LEP activity. However, it does feel that this more fittingly sits within the purview of Audit and Governance, and so requests that this committee consider doing so.

**Observation 1: The Committee had insufficient data on which to reach an informed view of the suitability of the LEP's governance arrangements, and suggests that the Audit and Governance Committee may wish to review the governance arrangements of Enterprise Oxfordshire in a year's time, including examples of how decisions were made throughout the year.**

12. During the meeting, members examined the financial liabilities of EO, questioning if the County Council would inherit these liabilities, including staff costs, as the sole shareholder. The LEP Chief Executive clarified that existing funding streams covered most liabilities, but the County Council, as the sole shareholder, would ultimately hold the underlying liability. If the funding from government grants or other sources were to dry up, the County Council could need to provide financial support to ensure the company's viability, although EO does run an operating reserve for unforeseen expenses or liquidation.
13. It is recognised that, in terms of the overall Council budget, even the worst-case financial scenario for EO would not qualify as being a key strategic risk to the Council. Nevertheless, being a shareholder of a company is new to the Council, and the Committee is keen to see that its incorporation is implemented responsibly. One aspect of this should be responsible financial management of finances to ensure that the liabilities associated with EO are adequately covered to allow operational stability in the event of an unexpected financial circumstance. Another is transparency. Members and the public should be able to understand the risk being assumed through being the sole shareholder to EO, and to assess for themselves its resilience and the potential impacts its incorporation could have on the Council. To do this, it is necessary to publish the necessary information, which the Committee encourages the Council to do.

**Recommendation 1: That the financial liabilities and resilience of Enterprise Oxfordshire should be clearly documented and monitored, ensuring that the organisation has adequate reserves to cover unexpected costs and maintain operational stability.**

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

14. As detailed above, a number of the Committee's questions are too early to address. Whilst not wishing to fetter the discretion of the post-election committee, members indicated their view that there would be value in this item returning after a year to update on progress. Likewise, it is hoped that the Audit and Governance Committee will review the governance arrangements of Enterprise Oxfordshire in a year's time, including examples of how decisions were made throughout the year and assess its suitability.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

15. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power:  
'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
16. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Kim Sawyer  
Interim Head of Legal and Governance

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Annex:             | Pro-forma Response Template   |
| Background papers: | None  |
| Other Documents:   | None  |
| Contact Officer:   | Tom Hudson<br>Scrutiny Manager<br><a href="mailto:tom.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk">tom.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a><br>Tel: 07791 494285 |

June 2025

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

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**Issue:** **Local Enterprise Partnership Integration Update**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** **Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet member for Finance**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** **17 June 2025**

**Response to report:**

*Enter text here.*

**Response to recommendations:**

| <b>Recommendation</b>   | <b>Accepted, rejected or partially accepted</b> | <b>Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)</b> |
|---|---|--|
| That the financial liabilities and resilience of Enterprise Oxfordshire should be clearly documented and monitored, ensuring that the |   |  |

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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| organisation has adequate reserves to cover unexpected costs and maintain operational stability. |  |  |
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## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 June 2025**

## **Business Management and Monitoring Report – Environment and Highways Focus Report of Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. The Performance Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Council's Business Management and Monitoring Report at its meeting on 04 April 2025. The report was largely the same as issued to Cabinet, but with some service-level data removed to ensure focus by the Committee on the overall picture and the specific performance of Environment and Highways.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, Cllr Pete Sudbury, Deputy Leader of the Council with responsibility for Climate Change, Environment & Future Generations, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management,

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, and Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, for attending the meeting and responding to questions.

## **SUMMARY**

5. The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the report, highlighting the positive direction in which the Council's performance was trending, and the prudence and effectiveness with which the Council was being managed.
6. In response to the introduction, the Committee began its questioning. Topics explored by the Committee included: the progress made on spending s.106 monies collected, the suitability of waste and recycling key performance indicators, maintaining understanding of customer satisfaction levels, the level of support for the Council's 'core schemes', the key financial and strategic risks faced by the Council, the success of the mitigations taken and its underlying resilience, as well as queries over spending on Growth Deal funding.
7. The Committee makes four recommendations. These seek to improve business monitoring and management reporting through suggested alterations to what is measured, and greater justification of its assessments with regards to risk.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

8. One area of discussion by the Committee concerned the Council's measure over the percentage of household waste which is reused, recycled or composed. With a year to date performance of 56.87%, the committee was informed that Oxfordshire is the best-performing county in England for recycling. However, the target is for 61.5% meaning the performance is judged to be red.
9. This position does not appear to be particularly helpful. If the Council is outperforming all other counties in England and yet the key performance indicator suggests that it is failing, the fault is not with the Council but with the measure. The Committee appreciates the importance of having stretch targets and high levels of ambition, but it does not believe the current target is realistic and should therefore be reviewed accordingly.
10. Further to this, the Committee accepts the views of the then Deputy Leader, who argued that the measure itself represents 'a legacy indicator'. Central government movements towards Extended Producer Responsibility alters the whole context and discussion around recycling, and new measures which take into account this significant change would be valuable. At a minimum, therefore, the Committee wishes the current measure to be reviewed and a more realistic level set, but it also suggests that the Cabinet consider an alternative, updated



measure which reflects the changes made by central government to the recycling landscape.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council, as a minimum, reviews its targets over the percentage of household waste which is reused, recycled or composted, or, preferably, that the Council draws up a new measure which will measure performance better in light of Extended Producer Responsibility measures.**

11. The BMMR report received by the Committee provided advice that the Council intended to remove the following measures on the basis that it was implementing a new telephony platform, which would make comparisons between the pre and post change impossible:
  - OCC 10.03 Overall customer satisfaction rate for the Customer Service Centre – telephony
  - OCC10.04 Answer 80% of calls to the Customer Service Centre within 30 seconds (exclude SHCT)
  - OCC10.13 The percentage of customer telephone calls abandoned at the Customer Service Centre.
12. The view of the Committee is that this is a mistake. It accepts that moving from one system to another makes comparing like with like impossible owing to the absence of a baseline figure. However, that is not a justification simply to cease to monitor customer satisfaction. Indeed, the Committee is of the view that if the Council is making the significant change of moving to a new system it is all the more vital that there is monitoring and feedback to be assured that the change is adequately meeting customer needs. As such, the Committee recommends that the Council maintain some measurement of customer satisfaction in relation to the Customer Service Centre.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council maintains a measure of customer satisfaction in relation to the Customer Service Centre specifically because of the move to a new telephony system.**

13. One of the Key Strategic Risks managed and reported on by the Council in the BMMR report is identified as 'Failure to deliver Oxford Core Schemes (Traffic Filters, Workplace Parking Levy, Zero Emissions Zone and associated city area schemes such as Low Traffic Neighbourhoods) with public support.'
14. Discussion and focus on this risk tends to be on the delivery element, whether the schemes are being implemented or not. However, discussion in Committee raised an important point. The risk the Council has identified is not that these schemes will simply not be delivered. Rather, the risk is that they will not be delivered *with public support*. The risk makes it clear that it is not enough simply to impose these schemes on an unwilling public, but that the Council must also win over the public to the benefits of these schemes. In exploring this issue, the Committee was not satisfied that the Council was measuring this support sufficiently to know whether or not it was avoiding a Key Strategic Risk. Its recommendation, therefore, is that the level of support for the

Council's Oxford Core Schemes is measured and reported as part of the BMMR to assure members and the public that the Council is carrying the local public with it in relation to its implementation of the core schemes.

**Recommendation 3: That the Council measures and reports on the level of local public support for Oxford Core Schemes within its Business Management and Monitoring Report.**

15. A further observation relating to the way that the Council reports on the management of its Key Strategic Risks is that it highlights both inherent risks and the residual risks which remain after mitigation. What is not clear, however, is the rationale or justification for the residual risk score. The Council's assessment must simply be taken as 'read' and cannot be subject to independent scrutiny or challenge. Consequently, the level of assurance provided is lessened. The Committee recommends that this is addressed, partially to provide that assurance, and partially to ensure that the document is 'live' and reflects the most current status of risk and mitigation activity.

**Recommendation 4: That the Council provides commentary on the recent actions taken to mitigate its Key Strategic Risks and the impact on the residual score within the Business Management and Monitoring Report.**

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

16. It is anticipated that the Committee will continue to provide scrutiny of the Council's BMMR report with similar focus areas throughout the next civic year.

## **LEGAL IMPLICATIONS**

17. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
18. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Kim Sawyer  
Interim Head of Legal and Governance

Annex: Pro-forma Response Template

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer:

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June 2025

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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in question were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

**Issue:** **Business Management and Monitoring Report – Environment and Highways Focus**

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet member for Finance

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** 17 June 2025

**Response to report:**

*Enter text here.*

**Response to recommendations:**

| Recommendation  | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. That the Council, as a minimum, reviews its targets over the percentage of |  |   |

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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|--|--|--|
| household waste which is reused, recycled or composted, or, preferably, that the Council draws up a new measure which will measure performance better in light of Extended Producer Responsibility measures. |  |  |
| 2. That the Council maintains a measure of customer satisfaction in relation to the Customer Service Centre specifically because of the move to a new telephony system.                                      |  |  |
| 3. That the Council measures and reports on the level of local public support for Oxford Core Schemes within its Business Management and Monitoring Report.  |  |  |
| 4. That the Council provides commentary on the recent actions taken to mitigate its Key Strategic Risks and the impact on the residual score within the Business Management and Monitoring Report.           |  |  |

## **Divisions Affected – All**

### **CABINET 17 June 2025**

### **– Rail Strategy Report of Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

#### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —
  - a) Note the recommendations contained in the body of this report and to consider and determine its response to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee, and
  - b) Agree that, once Cabinet has responded, relevant officers will continue to provide each meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee with a brief written update on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations for 12 months, or until they are completed (if earlier).

#### **REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND**

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, the Place Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that, within two months of the consideration of this report, the Cabinet publish a response to this report and any recommendations.

#### **INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW**

3. At its meeting on 23 April 2025, the Committee considered a report updating it on the development of the Council's Rail Strategy, the requirement for which is set out in Policy 21 of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP).
4. The Committee was grateful to Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Infrastructure and Development Strategy, and to Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Bryan Evans, Rail Project Manager, and Pete, Brunskill, Rail Development Lead, for attending to present the report.

## SUMMARY

5. The Committee established that the Council is developing the Rail Strategy to plan and coordinate the work that will be required, help influence the allocation of Government funding, leverage private sector investment and ultimately deliver substantially increased passenger and freight services. Following public consultation, it is envisaged that a new strategy will be completed in late 2025.
6. The Committee received an initial draft vision, objectives, and likely key projects associated with the strategy for early discussion. This was prior to the commencement of evidence-gathering and analysis that will be undertaken by officers during the summer of 2025.
7. The Director of Economy and Place and the Rail Project Manager discussed key projects including Oxford Railway Station expansion, electrification, and new stations with the Committee. Members emphasised stakeholder collaboration, active travel integration, and funding strategies, highlighting the need for realistic and vision-led planning.
8. The Committee also discussed collaboration with stakeholders such as Begbroke Science Park and Oxford University Development and the Director confirmed that there was ongoing support and discussions with partners, and that connectivity with travel and bus routes remained a priority.
9. The Committee hoped that its new membership would scrutinise the draft Strategy once it was ready and makes two recommendations relating to its development – one relating to strategic planning and the other around finance.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

10. The Committee welcomed the nascent strategy and was concerned that it should align with the ‘decide and provide’ or vision-led planning approach of the LTCP as opposed to the demand-led ‘predict and provide’. As set out in the LTCP on p100, the “decide and provide approach to transport planning decides on the preferred future and then provides the means to work towards that which can accommodate uncertainty. This offers the opportunity for more positive transport planning” in contrast to the traditional predict and provide approach which “uses past or historical traffic and socio-economic trends to determine the future” and which allows for “an increasing risk that infrastructure is provided that does not meet or shape the transport needs of the future.”<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.oxfordshire.gov.uk/sites/default/files/file/roads-and-transport-connecting-oxfordshire/LocalTransportandConnectivityPlan.pdf>, p100



11. This concern that it might not be vision-led arose from the timeline set out in the report which referred to there being “demand modelling and economic (GVA<sup>2</sup>) analysis” during June and July before the strategy was to be produced.
12. The Committee received assurances that the strategy would ultimately align with the vision-led approach but that there were early, more swiftly-deliverable elements that were linked to current demand. The earlier stages of the outworking of the strategy were necessarily therefore focused on a less visionary approach but one that would be able to feed into the regional-level planning that would be expected in a future new strategic authority. There was a need to make progress now, though.
13. The Committee recognised that there was clearly value in recognising current demand but that there should be greater attention to the regional- and strategic-level planning that would necessarily arise in the future, not least as a result of the Government’s encouragement of Spatial Development Strategies, through the Planning and Infrastructure Bill.
14. The Committee also recognised that there was uncertainty about the future but that, given the aim was for at least four new railway stations by 2040, significant swathes of the strategy and its action plan were some years ahead. It would therefore be appropriate to think ahead and to work back from the desired outcome, determining the steps that need to be taken to deliver the preferred future.
15. The Committee considered that it would be preferable for the timeline to explicitly reference vision-led planning for the long-term in the timeline for the project rather than for it to be implicitly understood. That would demonstrate the Council’s commitment to such in this sphere.
16. The Committee has previously moved a recommendation relating to the Government Office for Science’s The Futures Toolkit, to which Cabinet responded on 22 April 2025<sup>3</sup> and continues to commend it to the Council. The Futures and Foresights<sup>4</sup> approaches and toolkits available, including those of Mott McDonald<sup>5</sup>, would – the Committee posits – be of great value to the Council when approaching the draft strategy. They provide tools to deal with exactly the same sort of challenges the Council is facing in drawing up a long-term strategy. The Committee recommends that, in the Council’s modelling to devise the strategy, they take account of them.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council should integrate the Futures-led Foresight approach into the Rail Strategy modelling, to ensure it aligns***

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<sup>2</sup> Gross Value Added measures the value generated in the production of goods and services and is one measure of overall economic performance. The Office of National Statistics summarises it as “the value generated by any unit engaged in the production of goods and services.”

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/grossvalueaddedgva>

<sup>4</sup> <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s75862/Place%20to%20Cabinet%20-%20response%20pro%20forma%20-%20IFS%20and%20s106%20Project%20Review%20002%20v2%20cd.pdf>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.gov.uk/government/groups/futures-and-foresight>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.mottmac.com/en-gb/insights/topics/futures/>

***with the approach of the LTCP and to ensure and enable long-term strategic planning.***

17. There was a recognition that there would be funding challenges when it came to delivery of the Rail Strategy and that, without private-public finance, it would be difficult for the ambitions of the strategy to come to fruition. The Committee was heartened to hear of conversations with institutions and organisations eager to collaborate and a shared commitment to the success of the strategy. The Committee was hopeful that shared commitment might entail the contribution of funding.
18. The example of the funding of the Elizabeth Line in London was discussed in Committee. The Committee noted an article by the Chief Executive of London First which explained that 40% of the nearly £19 billion the Elizabeth Line cost “has been paid for by London’s businesses. This is not money that would have otherwise been spent in other ways, but new money on top of existing tax contributions.<sup>6</sup>” This was in addition to Government funding and Mayoral funding (including developer contributions and Crossrail Business Rate Supplement).
19. The Committee is clear that Council simply would not be able to finance the outworking of the Rail Strategy alone and will be dependent on innovative thinking, collaboration, and private-public funding. The Committee established that the Council had engaged specialist support on this issue and agreed that this would need exploring as part of the Council’s Commercial Strategy as well as the Rail Strategy.
20. Without there being a commitment to upskilling officers in how to deliver private-public finance on the scale needed, though, the Committee is concerned that the Council will be making its task harder. The Committee is, therefore, of the view that the Council should support private-public finance upskilling to make its ambitions achievable.
21. There is a wealth of literature available on how the Elizabeth Line came to be and how it was both financed and delivered<sup>7</sup>. The Committee considers that the Council should ensure that its lessons are heeded and applied when considering its own Rail Strategy.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council should support private-public finance upskilling and apply lessons from the funding of the Elizabeth Line.***

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

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<sup>6</sup> <https://www.onlondon.co.uk/john-dickie-london-has-paid-for-the-elizabeth-line-the-whole-country-is-already-benefiting-from-it/>

<sup>7</sup> Readily accessible examples include the [House of Commons Briefing Paper \(CBP00876\) by Andrew Haylen ‘Crossrail \(Elizabeth Line\)’](#) and the [Crossrail Learning Legacy Website](#)

22. It will be for the 2025/2026 Committee members to decide whether or not to continue scrutinising the Rail Strategy but it is currently expected that they consider the draft strategy at their meeting on 24 September 2024.

## LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

23. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
24. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

Kim Sawyer  
Interim Head of Legal and Governance

|                    |   |
|--------------------|---|
| Annex:             | Pro-forma Response Template   |
| Background papers: | None  |
| Other Documents:   | None  |
| Contact Officer:   | Richard Doney<br>Scrutiny Officer<br><a href="mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk">richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk</a> |

June 2025

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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

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### Issue:

**Lead Cabinet Member(s):** Cllr Judy Roberts, Cabinet member for Place, Environment, and Climate Action

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>** 17 June 2025

### Response to report:

*Enter text here.*

### Response to recommendations:

| Recommendation  | Accepted, rejected or partially accepted | Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected) |
|---|--|---|
| 1. That the Council should integrate the Futures-led Foresight approach into the Rail Strategy modelling, to ensure it aligns with the approach of the LTCP and |  |   |

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<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

|  |  |  |
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| to ensure and enable long-term strategic planning.   |  |  |
| 2. That the Council should support private-public finance upskilling and apply lessons from the funding of the Elizabeth Line. |  |  |