



PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 26 June 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 11.57 am.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Ian Snowdon - in the Chair
Councillor Toyah Overton - Deputy Chair
Councillor James Barlow
Councillor Will Boucher-Giles
Councillor Imade Edosomwan
Councillor Bethia Thomas
Councillor Lee Evans
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher
Councillor Georgina Heritage

Officers:

Stephen Chandler, Executive Director for People
Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services
Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health
Victoria Baran, Deputy Director for Adult Social Care
Sam Harper, Head of Learning Disability Provision
Services
Debbie Montgomery, Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager
for Oxfordshire Employment Services
Nicola Dyche, Strategic Commissioner for Workforce Adult
Social Care
Jenny Taylor, Workforce Associate for County Print
Finishers
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer
Ben Piper, Democratic Services Officer (Committee
Officer)

The Council considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except insofar as otherwise specified, the reasons for the decisions are contained in the agenda and reports, copies of which are attached to the signed Minutes.

12/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Edwards as well as from Cllr Thomas who had anticipated substituting for her.

Apologies were also received from Cllr Bearder, Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care.

13/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

14/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meetings held on 20th March 2025, and 20th May 2025, as true and accurate records.

15/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

16/25 OXFORDSHIRE EMPLOYMENT SERVICE REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Victoria Baran, Deputy Director for Adult Social Care, and Sam Harper, Head of Learning Disability Provision Services, were invited to present a report on the Oxfordshire Employment Service.

Stephen Chandler, Executive Director for People, Debbie Montgomery, Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager for Oxfordshire Employment Services, Nicola Dyche, Strategic Commissioner for Workforce Adult Social Care, and Jenny Taylor, Workforce Associate for County Print Finishers, also attended to support the report and answer the Committee's questions.

The Director introduced the item highlighting the range of services emphasised the importance of the service.

The Deputy Director and the Head of Services gave a detailed overview to the Committee.

The Workforce Associate shared her journey with Oxfordshire Employment Service and County Print Finishers.

In discussion with the Committee, the following areas were explored:

- The projected employment outcomes for the internship programme and its increase from 52% to 65%. It was explained that the outcomes had been around 60% before COVID-19, dropped during the pandemic, and were now increasing again, with larger numbers of interns to begin with. Outcomes monitoring. The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager explained that the Oxfordshire Employment Service maintained contact with individuals after they were placed in employment, usually on a monthly basis. The service did not have a fixed programme duration and continued to support individuals throughout their employment. The Connect to Work programme monitored sustained employment beyond six months as a key data metric.

- Members explored the scope of eligibility for the scheme, the capacity to grow the scheme, and the barriers preventing people from participating. The Head of Learning Disability Provision Services and Strategic Commissioner for Workforce Adult Social Care explained that the Connect to Work programme had a broad eligibility, including care leavers, ex-offenders, and people with mental health issues. They mentioned that the programme aimed to support 2000 people over five years, with funding of around £8.4 million. The main barrier identified was the need for more employers to participate and offer opportunities. The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager noted a significant increase in demand for the service, and the Connect to Work programme would help address this by providing additional funding and resources.

Members asked how the service worked with neighbouring authorities to support residents living near county borders. The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager explained that Oxfordshire Employment Service supported individuals within Oxfordshire, but if someone lived close to another authority, they would coordinate with the nearest relevant service to provide support. This ensured that individuals received appropriate assistance without needing to travel long distances.

- Members raised concerns about the stability of the Oxfordshire Employment Services and Connect to Work programme, its funding, and about the potential disappearance of funding. The Director of Adult Social Services explained that the programme was funded by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and was designed to be delivered over five years. She acknowledged that the funding was paid retrospectively based on delivery results, which required careful planning and execution. The Director expressed confidence in the government's commitment to the programme, noting that it was a priority and that the team was prepared to deliver results to secure the funding. However, she also mentioned that, if the funding were to disappear, the programme could not be delivered as planned.
- Members questioned whether applicants faced rejection from the scheme, how people who the scheme failed were supported, and how involved Oxfordshire County Council (the Council) had been in employing individuals as part of the scheme. The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager explained that the scheme had a zero-rejection policy, meaning that if people wanted to work, they would be supported. However, there were eligibility restrictions based on funding streams, and if someone did not meet the criteria, they would be signposted to more appropriate services. For those whom the scheme failed, they were referred to other support services such as community connections, Oxford Health, Mind, and Aspire.

Regarding the Council's involvement in employing individuals, the Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager mentioned that various departments within the Council had been supportive. For example, the IT department and customer services had successfully employed individuals from the scheme. The workforce associate added that many individuals who started at County Print Finishers

eventually moved to different departments within the Council, highlighting the Council's commitment to employing individuals from the scheme.

The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager explained that the Supported Employment Quality Framework (SEQF) model ensured that individuals were paid the same as others in similar roles within the department. They verified this by obtaining wage slips and job descriptions to ensure parity. She mentioned that they had not encountered any instances where individuals supported by the scheme were paid less due to their disabilities.

- Members questioned how Oxfordshire Employment Services chose who to work with, particularly in relation to placements. The Oxford Contracts Delivery Manager explained that they conducted employer webinars twice a year and worked closely with large organisations such as Grondon and Thames Water to get them on board. The focus was on ensuring that employers supported their goals and visions. The Director of Adult Social Services added that the success of the programme depended on the collaboration with Oxfordshire employers.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- Officers would share the methodology of how employment targets were set by the Oxfordshire Employment Services and DWP

The Committee **AGREED** to recommendations under the following headings:

- That the Council should explore whether an accreditation scheme would be an effective strategy to encourage businesses to work with Oxfordshire Employment Services.
- That the Council should expand and enhance the work and scope of the Oxfordshire Employment Services.

17/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 6)

Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, Ansaf Azhar, Director of Public Health, and Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People, were invited to advise the Committee as members devised their work programme.

The Chair asked when the CQC report would be available, but the Director of Adult Social Services was unable to confirm a date due to an embargo. The Committee showed interest in reviewing both the Oxfordshire Way and its adaptation alongside the Marmotisation of Oxfordshire. The Director of Public Health recommended focusing on how the Oxfordshire Way addresses high-need areas and rural inequality, highlighting its inclusion in the updated Health and Wellbeing Strategy's ten priorities.

Committee members also wanted to scrutinise issues such as homelessness, unpaid carers (noting their financial impact and the existing cross-sector strategy), and

suggested future collaboration with the Health and Wellbeing Board. Additional topics identified for scrutiny included:

- Adult social care partners
- Engagement with seldom heard groups
- NHS collaboration on mental health services
- The Learning Disability Strategy within the LGA peer review framework
- The Health and Wellbeing Strategy itself

The Committee **NOTED** the existing work programme and **AGREED** that the Democratic Services Officer should draft a detailed work programme, in consultation with the Chair, to be circulated before the next meeting.

18/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **NOTED** the Committee Action and Recommendation tracker.

19/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda No. 8)

There were none.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing