

AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 26 November 2025 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 3.48 pm.

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Roz Smith – in the Chair
Councillor John Shiri (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor James Fry
Councillor David Hingley
Councillor Gavin McLauchlan
Councillor Leigh Rawlins

Non-voting Members: Kate Cartwright
Paul McGinn

Others in attendance: Kalthiemah Abrahams, Ernst and Young
Simon Mathers, Ernst and Young
Jack Nicholson, Democratic Services Officer

Agenda Item	Officer Attending
8	Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services Ella Stevens, Deputy Chief Accountant
9	Tim Chapple, Treasury Manager
10 and 11	Declan Brolly, Counter Fraud Team Manager Sarah Cox, Chief Internal Auditor
12	Louise Tustian, Director of Transformation, Customer Experience and Digital introduced the report
13	Michael Adcock, Deputy Chief Fire Officer Matt Shanck, Strategic Risk and Assurance Officer
14–18	Anita Bradley, Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer Sarah Smith, Senior Governance Lead

The Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and decided as set out below. Except as 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.

76/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

There were no apologies for absence from members of the Committee.

The Chief Fire Officer sent his apologies for not being present for Item 13. The Deputy Chief Officer was present on his behalf.

77/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

The Chair declared an interest in relation to Item 13; her nephews were Oxfordshire firefighters. However, there were no objections to her keeping the chair throughout.

78/25 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

(Agenda No. 3)

In response to a question at the previous meeting, the Treasury Manager said that the cost to the Council of managing existing funds was 0.68 per cent and that the dividends that the Council received were net of those management charges.

The Committee noted the written responses to questions raised at the meeting held on 17 September 2025, which they had received from the Head of Corporate Finance and the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer.

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 September 2025 as an accurate record of proceedings.

79/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were no petitions.

Mr David Hearn did not attend the meeting to address the Committee.

80/25 ERNST AND YOUNG DRAFT AUDIT RESULTS REPORT 2024/25

(Agenda No. 5)

External auditors from Ernst & Young Limited Liability Partnership introduced reports for this and the following two items.

The Committee asked about the capitalisation of labour and noted that it applied to project management and that the Home Upgrade Grant was a back payment for services received.

The Committee also asked about outstanding balances and noted that the system did not always capture them accurately, although auditors could clearly identify who had and had not paid.

The Committee discussed their ambition for unqualified accounts.

The Committee also asked about the variation fee and noted that the Public Sector Accounting Standards Authority sets the audit fee scale annually in consultation with the Council.

The Committee sought and were given assurance that the factual misstatement of £8.3 million in the adoption of IFRS 16 did not have a material impact on the report.

RESOLVED to note Ernst and Young's Draft Audit Results Report for 2024/25.

81/25 ERNST AND YOUNG DRAFT AUDITOR'S ANNUAL REPORT 2024/25

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee noted that at the end of March 2025:

- The County Fund or Revenue General Reserve was £45 million.
- The Medium-Term Fiscal Plan Deficit was £5 million.
- The Business Rates Review was forecast for £5 million.
- The Fair Funding Review was forecast for £20 million.

The Council also noted that Special Educational Needs and Disability (SEND), excluding the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficit, could cost up to £50 million per year.

The Council also noted that Usable Capital Reserves were at £221 million, which were not enough to cover the financial pressures identified without additional support.

The Committee discussed the possibility of applying Public Works Loan Board (PWLB) borrowing to the High Needs Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) deficits.

RESOLVED to note Ernst and Young's Draft Auditor's Annual Report for 2024/25.

82/25 ERNST AND YOUNG DRAFT AUDIT RESULTS REPORT FOR THE PENSION FUND 2024/25

(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee asked about the authorisation of use of journals within the Council and noted that the review process constituted sufficient control.

ACTION

External auditors said that they would take a question about the proportion of pension funds arising from riskier Level 3 investments away for a response.

RESOLVED to note Ernst and Young's Draft Audit Results Report for the Pension Fund for 2024/25.

83/25 STATEMENT OF ACCOUNTS 2024/25

(Agenda No. 8)

The Deputy Chief Account introduced the report.

The Committee asked about the Capital Programme overspend and noted that a Board of officers was being introduced to improve its forecasting and delivery.

The Committee said that it was disappointing that they were still waiting for a government White Paper on SEND reform.

The Chair congratulated the Deputy Chief Accountant on her appointment as the Council's Chief Accountant.

RESOLVED to:

- a) approve the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 at Annex 1;
- b) note the Summary Accounts 2024/25 at Annex 2;
- c) agree that no changes are required to the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25;
- d) approve the Draft Letter of Representations 2024/25 for the Oxfordshire County Council accounts at Annex 3; and
- e) agree that the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, in consultation with the Chair of the Committee (or Deputy Chair in her absence), can make any further changes to the Statement of Accounts 2024/25 and/or letters of representation that may arise during completion of the audit.

84/25 TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID-TERM REVIEW 2025/26

(Agenda No. 9)

The Treasury Manager introduced the report.

The Chair congratulated Treasury Management on the accrualment of nearly £10 million in interest at mid-term for 2025/26, which was double what was expected.

The Committee asked about the use of Lender Option Borrower Option (LOBO) Loans and noted that Treasury Management always set aside money for their repayment.

The Committee sought and received assurance that actions were in place to stabilise the High Needs Dedicated School Grant (DSG) Block cumulative deficit.

ACTIONS

The Treasury Manager said that he would answer a question about the minimum repayments for loans from the Public Works Loan Board at the next meeting.

It was agreed that the High Needs DSG deficit would be referred to the Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer and the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation for a fuller response.

RESOLVED to note the council's treasury management activity for the first half of 2025/26 and recommend Council to note council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2025/26.

85/25 COUNTER-FRAUD UPDATE

(Agenda No. 10)

The Chief Internal Auditor and Counter Fraud Team Manager introduced the report for this and the following item.

The Committee asked about fraud taking place in their divisions and noted that that this was and would be dealt with by Trading Standards and partner agencies.

The Committee also asked for an update on Counter-Fraud Cases raised against Council employees and noted that that was not possible for live investigations.

The Committee asked about Blue Badge Enforcement and noted that data matching led by the Cabinet Office took place every two years to prevent fraud.

The Committee sought and received assurance that officers were confident in the National Fraud Investigation's efforts in relation to Adult Social Care.

RESOLVED to note the summary of activity against the Counter Fraud Plan for 2025/26.

86/25 ANTI-FRAUD AND CORRUPTION STRATEGY

(Agenda No. 11)

The Chair asked how the failure to prevent fraud would be judged as such and noted that the Council had all statutory requirements around prevention already in place.

The Committee asked about fraud and corruption in relation to any contractors and noted that if the Council were affected then this strategy would apply.

The Committee sought and received assurance that all officers received Anti-Fraud and Corruption training as required.

RESOLVED to approve the revised Anti-Fraud and Corruption Strategy Executive Summary.

87/25 RISK MANAGEMENT UPDATE

(Agenda No. 12)

The Director of Transformation, Customer Experience & Digital introduced the report.

The Committee asked about the risk in relation to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and noted that those risks had been de-escalated to operational level.

The Committee also discussed how and why the Council pools data in relation to risk with other Councils to identify best practice.

The Committee also asked about the Inherent Risk Score used in the report and the processes involved in risks featuring on the Strategic Risk Register.

The Committee noted that members were entitled to suggest risks for inclusion on the Strategic Risk Register at any time and not just in their meetings.

ACTIONS

The Director of Transformation, Customer Experience and Digital said that she would write to the Committee with further information about Strategic Risk 11 – Section 106.

It was agreed that training would be set up, for members, to explain the Council's Strategic Risk Register and Inherent Risk Score in greater depth.

RESOLVED to note the risk management update and approve the revised risk and opportunities policy 2025/26.

88/25 OXFORDSHIRE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE STATEMENT OF ASSURANCE 2024-25

(Agenda No. 13)

The Deputy Chief Fire Officer and Strategic Risk and Assurance Officer introduced the report.

The Committee congratulated Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service on delivering value for money and thanked firefighters for their work.

The Committee asked if the principle of equality extended to delivering a consistent quality of service countywide and were advised that it did.

The Committee discussed lithium-batteries, high-rise buildings, and houses in multiple occupation as fire hazards and the work that the Service did to minimise risk.

Officers urged Members to let the Service know of any houses in multiple occupation in their divisions that would benefit from a fire safety inspection.

RESOLVED to approve the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service Statement of Assurance 2024/25 for publication.

89/25 ANNUAL GOVERNANCE STATEMENT 2024-25 - ACTION UPDATE

(Agenda No. 14)

The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer introduced the report for this and the following four items.

RESOLVED to note this update on the actions from the Annual Governance Statement 2024/25.

90/25 ANNUAL REPORT ON WHISTLEBLOWING 2024/25

(Agenda No. 15)

The Committee discussed the potentially negative connotations of the word whistleblowing; however, they noted that whistleblowing had increased with the new policy.

The Committee discussed whistleblowing in relation to any contractors and noted that the Council expected contractors to have their own policies in place.

The Committee equally asked if the Council had considered contracting its own whistleblowing and noted that that had been considered but that it was deemed unnecessary.

The Committee sought and received assurance from officers that measures were in place to prevent a culture of relation to whistleblowing within the Council.

RESOLVED to:

- a) note the number of incidents of Whistleblowing in the financial year 2024-25 and
- b) note that training on Whistleblowing was being rolled out within the Council

91/25 GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO STRENGTHENING THE STANDARDS AND CONDUCT FRAMEWORK FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES IN ENGLAND CONSULTATION

(Agenda No. 16)

The Committee approved of the proposal for a system that could permit councillors to be suspended from office, for instance, where legal action is taken against them.

The Committee noted that this would be further discussed by Parliament and as such would feature on a future agenda.

RESOLVED to note the government's response to the Strengthening the Standards and Conduct Framework for local authorities in England Consultation, and that legislation is intended to be brought through subject to parliamentary scheduling.

92/25 CONSTITUTION MEMBER WORKING GROUP

(Agenda No. 17)

The Chair stressed the importance of members attending the Constitution Member Working Group if appointed and of reporting back to their respective political groups.

The Committee agreed that there should be an additional Liberal Democrat member in the group to better enable majority voting by having an odd number of members.

The Committee also agreed that members of the whole Council should be able to make written recommendations to the group and be informed of its discussions.

RESOLVED to:

- a) agree with the proposal to reconvene the Constitution Member Working Group, as set out in this report;
- b) agree and comment as necessary, on the draft terms of reference for the working group, as set out in Annex A; and
- c) request the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer to seek nominations for representatives from each political group who will attend the working group meetings, in accordance with paragraph 15 of this report.

93/25 MEMBER CHAMPIONS

(Agenda No. 18)

The Chair requested that in future reports each Member Champion have a named Cabinet Member to whom they report to in performing their function.

The Committee asked how the Council determined which areas required a Champion and noted that the list was the result of the executive identifying a particular need.

Members of the Committee who were Champions encouraged others to get involved in this area of the Council's work, should the opportunity present itself.

The Chair thanked officers and all the Council's Champions for their work.

RESOLVED to recommend to Council to amend the Council's Constitution to replace part 8.5, Member Champion Role with the text in Appendix 2.

94/25 AUDIT WORKING GROUP UPDATE

(Agenda No. 19)

There was none.

95/25 AUDIT AND GOVERNANCE WORK PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 20)

RESOLVED to note the Committee Work Programme to November 2026 with the following additions:

- Training on Risk Management before the Committee meeting on 11 March 2026
- Updates on the Constitution Working Group, provisionally, on that day

..... in the Chair

Date of signing