



## ***Notice of a Meeting***

### **Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

**Friday, 11 July 2025 at 10.00 am**

**Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

**These proceedings are open to the public**

If you wish to view proceedings, please click on this [Live Stream Link](#).  
However, that will not allow you to participate in the meeting.

#### **Membership**

**Chair:** Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE

**Deputy Chair:** Councillor Andy Graham

**Councillors:** Dr Izzy Creed                      Emma Markham                      John Shiri  
Georgina Heritage                      Toyah Overton  
Johnny Hope-Smith                      James Plumb

**Co-Optees:** Hana G                                      Toby Long                                      Peace Nnaji  
Fraser Long                                      Katie N

**Date of Next Meeting:** *26 September 2025*

**For more information about this Committee please contact:**

Committee Officer:

Email:

Martin Reeves  
Chief Executive

July 2025

## What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee focuses on on the following key areas a) All services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education (including Home to School Transport and Special Educational Needs and Disability but excluding adult education), and support of families; b) The Council's statutory functions in relation to children's social care and safeguarding. This includes public health as they relate to children and young people where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; c) Matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services d) The welfare of unaccompanied young asylum seekers e) Services for Young Carers

## How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am 4 working day before the date of the meeting.**

## About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 63 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 678,000 residents.

These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £0.9 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 9 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

## About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

## What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets up to 4 times a year or more. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

**If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting**

**A hearing loop is available at County Hall.**

# AGENDA

## 1. Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.

## 2. Declaration of Interests

See guidance note on the back page.

## 3. Minutes (Pages 1 - 12)

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 13 June 2025 and to receive information arising from them.

## 4. Petitions and Public Addresses

Members of the public who wish to speak on a substantive item on the agenda at this meeting can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9.00 a.m. three working days before the meeting, i.e., Tuesday 8 July, 2025.

Requests should be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer at [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk).

If you are speaking 'virtually', you may submit a written statement of your presentation to ensure that if the technology fails, then your views can still be taken into account. A written copy of your statement can be provided no later than 9.00 a.m. on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

Where there are a number of requests from persons wishing to present similar views on the same issue, the Chair may require that the views be put by a single spokesperson. It is expected that only in exceptional circumstances will a person (or organisation) be allowed to address more than one meeting on a particular issue in any period of six months.

The public is reminded that the Committee is not a decision-making body and that it cannot investigate individual complaints. The Committee requests that no individual children are named when addressing the Committee.

## 5. School Catering Service - Proposed change of provision for schools (Pages 13 - 28)

The Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Lorna Baxter, and the Director of Property and Assets, Vic Kurzeja, have been invited to present a report on proposals for the Council's school catering service.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

*The annex to the report is exempt from disclosure. The information in this case is exempt in that it falls within the following prescribed categories: 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in*

*disclosing the information, in that a negotiation is ongoing and would prejudice the position of the authority in the process of that negotiation and the Council's standing generally in relation to such matters in future, to the detriment of the Council's ability properly to discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.*

## **6. Corporate Cleaning Service - Proposed out-source of in-house cleaning service (Pages 29 - 38)**

The Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Lorna Baxter, and the Director of Property and Assets, Vic Kurzeja, have been invited to present a report on proposals for the Council's cleaning service.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

*The annex to the report is exempt from disclosure. The information in this case is exempt in that it falls within the following prescribed categories: 3. Information relating to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information) and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information, in that a negotiation is ongoing and would prejudice the position of the authority in the process of that negotiation and the Council's standing generally in relation to such matters in future, to the detriment of the Council's ability properly to discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.*

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## **7. Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 39 - 54)**

The Committee is recommended to **AGREE** its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

In order to inform its work planning, the Committee has requested a data pack and has invited officers to advise as it devises its plan.

The Cabinet Forward Plan can be found

here: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgListPlanItems.aspx?PlanId=448&RP=115>

The most recent BMMR, submitted to Cabinet in March 2025, can be found

here: <https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=115&MId=7477&Ver=4>

## **8. Committee Action and Recommendation Tracker (Pages 55 - 60)**

The Committee is recommended to **NOTE** the progress of previous recommendations and actions arising from previous meetings, having raised any questions on the contents.

## 9. Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations (Pages 61 - 62)

Attached is the draft Cabinet response to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee report on The Virtual School, expected to be approved at the 15 July 2025 cabinet meeting. The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the response.

## **Councillors declaring interests**

### **General duty**

You must declare any disclosable pecuniary interests when the meeting reaches the item on the agenda headed 'Declarations of Interest' or as soon as it becomes apparent to you.

### **What is a disclosable pecuniary interest?**

Disclosable pecuniary interests relate to your employment; sponsorship (i.e. payment for expenses incurred by you in carrying out your duties as a councillor or towards your election expenses); contracts; land in the Council's area; licenses for land in the Council's area; corporate tenancies; and securities. These declarations must be recorded in each councillor's Register of Interests which is publicly available on the Council's website.

Disclosable pecuniary interests that must be declared are not only those of the member her or himself but also those member's spouse, civil partner or person they are living with as husband or wife or as if they were civil partners.

### **Declaring an interest**

Where any matter disclosed in your Register of Interests is being considered at a meeting, you must declare that you have an interest. You should also disclose the nature as well as the existence of the interest. If you have a disclosable pecuniary interest, after having declared it at the meeting you must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

### **Members' Code of Conduct and public perception**

Even if you do not have a disclosable pecuniary interest in a matter, the Members' Code of Conduct says that a member 'must serve only the public interest and must never improperly confer an advantage or disadvantage on any person including yourself' and that 'you must not place yourself in situations where your honesty and integrity may be questioned'.

### **Members Code – Other registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to the financial interest or wellbeing of one of your other registerable interests then you must declare an interest. You must not participate in discussion or voting on the item and you must withdraw from the meeting whilst the matter is discussed.

Wellbeing can be described as a condition of contentedness, healthiness and happiness; anything that could be said to affect a person's quality of life, either positively or negatively, is likely to affect their wellbeing.

Other registrable interests include:

- a) Any unpaid directorships
- b) Any body of which you are a member or are in a position of general control or management and to which you are nominated or appointed by your authority.

- c) Any body (i) exercising functions of a public nature (ii) directed to charitable purposes or (iii) one of whose principal purposes includes the influence of public opinion or policy (including any political party or trade union) of which you are a member or in a position of general control or management.

### **Members Code – Non-registrable interests**

Where a matter arises at a meeting which directly relates to your financial interest or wellbeing (and does not fall under disclosable pecuniary interests), or the financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate, you must declare the interest.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then you must declare the interest.

In order to determine whether you can remain in the meeting after disclosing your interest the following test should be applied:

Where a matter affects the financial interest or well-being:

- a) to a greater extent than it affects the financial interests of the majority of inhabitants of the ward affected by the decision and;
- b) a reasonable member of the public knowing all the facts would believe that it would affect your view of the wider public interest.

You may speak on the matter only if members of the public are also allowed to speak at the meeting. Otherwise you must not take part in any discussion or vote on the matter and must not remain in the room unless you have been granted a dispensation.

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## **EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 13 June 2025 commencing at 1.00 pm and finishing at 3.45 pm.

**Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE - in the Chair  
Councillor Andy Graham (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Dr Izzy Creed  
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher  
Councillor Johnny Hope-Smith  
Councillor Emma Markham  
Councillor Toyah Overton  
Councillor James Plumb

**Co-Opted Members:**

Hana G

**Other Members in  
Attendance:**

Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council  
Councillor Glynis Phillips  
Councillor John Shiri

**Officers:**

Stephen Chandler, Executive Director of People  
Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services  
Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and  
Inclusion  
Deborah Smit, Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion  
Stephen Good, Home to School Transport Programme  
Manager  
Jean Kelly, Deputy Director of Children's Social Care  
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer  
Ben Piper, Democratic Services 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.*

### **23/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS**

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Heritage, with Cllr Fletcher substituting. Apologies were also received from the co-opted members Katie N and Peace Nnaji.

Cllr John Shiri attended online as a guest of the Chair.

### **24/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

**25/25 MINUTES**  
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes for the meetings on 28 March 2025 and 20 May 2025 were **APPROVED** as true and accurate records.

**26/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**  
(Agenda No. 4)

Cllr Phillips, as the member for Barton, Sandhills & Risinghurst, addressed concerns about reduction of bus services for children attending Wheatley Park School, and concerns about the safety of their children who would need to cross the dual carriageway without a pedestrian crossing. Cllr Phillips also raised concerns over the safety of the cycle path.

Kimberly Morgan highlighted systemic failings by Oxfordshire County Council in supporting SEND children, referencing 13 cases upheld by the Local Government Ombudsman. She emphasised the need for a fit-for-purpose action plan and trauma-informed approaches, urging the Committee to ensure the proposed policies genuinely meet the needs of SEND children.

Anita Steptoe shared her experience as a mother of a child with autism and developmental delays, detailing the failures in handling her son's EHCP and the distress caused by inadequate support. She called for an apology from the Council and urged the Committee to ensure no other parent endures similar hardships.

Claire Brenner, speaking on behalf of the Education Otherwise Than At School (EOTAS) working group, discussed the need for detailed, comprehensive guidance on EOTAS, expressing concerns about the current draught policy and its lack of clarity. She emphasised the importance of trauma-informed approaches and urged the Committee to ensure the policy and guidance are co-produced with parents and reflect their needs.

Neil Barry, speaking as a parent of a former Woodeaton student, described the decline of Woodeaton Manor School, attributing it to the exodus of over fifty staff members and the failure of the interim governing board. He referred to early visits by the Chief Executive of the Propeller Academy Trust and alleged conflicts of interest among governors.

Melody Drinkwater addressed the Committee on behalf of Oxfordshire SEND Parent Action and set out the group's concerns about the Council's response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman (LGSCO) directive for section 19. She emphasised the trauma experienced by the SEND community and called for measures to mitigate harm and address unmet needs. Ms Drinkwater expressed disappointment with the lack of co-production in the latest plan and urged the Committee to consider an extraordinary meeting with stakeholders before the next Cabinet meeting in July.

Katie Squires described her son's experience at Woodeaton Manor School. Initially supportive, the school faced issues when the headteacher took leave, leading to staffing problems and reduced timetables. High staff turnover caused disruption, triggering her son's anxiety and self-harm. Essential therapies ceased, and parent communication declined. Ms Squires withdrew her son, who lacked alternative provision for seven months. She called for accountability and highlighted the impact of this situation.

Nadine Haigh shared her experience as a full-time caregiver to two teenagers needing EOTAS packages. She requested a short-term deferral of the draft EOTAS policy for genuine consultation with parents.

D/Cllr Sally Whiteman explained that she had sat on the Committee until the May 2025 election and expressed concerns about the lack of communication from Woodeaton about future plans and lack of transparency over the dealings of Woodeaton. She encouraged the Committee to ensure they scrutinised the issue in full.

Emma Bliss discussed the severe impact of trauma and burnout on families needing EOTAS. She described the catastrophic effects of trauma on children, including loss of basic abilities and constant distress. Ms Bliss criticised the EOTAS policy for not mentioning trauma and stressed the importance of a trauma-informed approach.

Tressa Verrier highlighted that parents generally want their children in school and criticised schools for failing to meet children's needs, leading to crises and the need for alternative provision. Ms Verrier shared her personal experience of her son being ignored by his school, resulting in him walking out and eventually refusing to return. She emphasised the importance of the action plan arising from the Section 19 report kicking in quickly to save children and reduce costs for the local authority.

The Chair had invited Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum to address the Committee, with Jules Francis-Sinclair, the Co-Chair, raising concerns about the Section 19 response's lack of clarity, transparency, and accountability. She noted that the Council had admitted confusion about its duties, leading to legal issues. Ms Francis-Sinclair criticised the action plan's development without proper consultation and harmful language in documents. She called for a formal apology, meaningful co-production, and improved oversight of Section 19 and EOTAS guidance.

**27/25 EDUCATION ACT 1996 (SECTION 19) - RESPONSE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT OMBUDSMAN'S REPORT**  
(Agenda No. 5)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, attended to present the Council's response to the Local Government and Social Care Ombudsman's (LGSCO) report and was accompanied by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and Deborah Smit, Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion. The report set out learning from complaints to the Council relating to s.19 provision and the process of developing the Council's s.19 approach

and Pathway of Action to manage applications for provision following 15 days of school absence.

The Leader of the Council acknowledged the importance of addressing the issues raised by the Ombudsman's report on Section 19. She thanked all those who had addressed the Committee for their feedback on all items and stressed the importance of getting all the policies under consideration right.

The Director of Children's Services explained the requirement to comply with the Ombudsman's directives and the challenges faced in meeting the 15-day timeframe for alternative education provision. She acknowledged difficulties in either returning children to school or providing alternative provision within the specified period and highlighted the need for staff training to address these issues.

The Committee sought assurance that those whose complaints had been upheld had received an apology and was advised that an apology and remedy were issued within the process of responding to the Ombudsman's process, often before the formal upholding of complaints. The discussion highlighted that the cases spanned the last five years, during which a pattern of not taking having taken decisive legal action was identified.

Members sought clarification about the requirement to provide alternative provision (AP) within 15 days, and raised concerns that starting legal action against the family would be counterproductive. The Deputy Director acknowledged this concern and explained that the legislation required either the child to return to school or alternative provision to be arranged within 15 days. If neither was achieved, the Council must prosecute the parents for non-attendance, which had been a difficult position for staff who aimed to prioritise the child's needs.

Members raised concerns about the action plan's lack of Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Time-bound (SMART) outcomes. The Deputy Director stated that the current plan met the Ombudsman's requirements, with detailed targets to follow in a forthcoming policy. Whilst outlining necessary actions, it lacked specific metrics. Members also asked about the process flowchart's users and its scope.

The Deputy Director explained it was for officers dealing with children not attending school due to varied reasons like medical issues or exclusions. The flowchart aimed to clarify processes for legal compliance. The Council initially drafted it and would consult schools for agreement. It was complex but that was because the process was complex. It was intended for officers to use rather than being intended for the public.

A question was raised about making policy effective and measurable, and whether there was an element of co-design to keep children in education. The Deputy Director explained that the alternative education provision working group was working on guidance for alternative education provision, involving the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum and other stakeholders. It was acknowledged that it was difficult to write a policy that was general enough to cover all needs while being specific to individual children.

Members discussed the obligations under section 19 and the measures in place to engage with school leadership and governors given the timeline pressures. The Deputy Director explained that the county attendance team worked with individual schools, meeting with secondary schools fortnightly to discuss attendance and support for children. The aim was to address issues early and to ensure children do not remain out of school for 15 days without intervention.

The Committee asked if the concerns raised about the culture at the Council by some public speakers, particularly around engagement with families, were founded and sought assurance that steps had been taken to improve the culture. Officers highlighted initiatives like attendance and home education officers engaging with communities and explaining policies in libraries.

The Committee was advised that the Council aimed to strengthen relationships by involving parent carer fora and stakeholders in projects. Staff were supported with trauma-informed practices to boost their confidence in decision-making. The focus was on consistent, reliable decisions and increased dialogue with parents. The Council recognised the need for ongoing improvement in relationships and culture.

The Committee established that the training on the s.19 duty, emphasising responsibilities and legal requirements, provided to 42 members of staff referenced in the report had been mandatory for all relevant staff. This included county attendance officers and Children Missing Education officers.

The Committee agreed that, if the s.19 approach and Pathway of Action was agreed by Cabinet, that it would expect to receive a monitoring report early in 2026.

The Committee agreed that it would be helpful to receive case-studies of individual children's pathways (suitably anonymised). The Committee also expressed interest in understanding how trauma-informed education and restorative practice were being developed in schools and requested more information on this. It would welcome attendance of one of the Headteachers involved in developing the school-led alternative education provision to a future meeting.

#### **ACTION:**

The Deputy Director to provide more detailed data on children who were not attending school in these circumstances as part of the data pack expected for the meeting of the Committee on 11 July 2026.

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

- That, notwithstanding the complexity of the processes being set out, the Council should ensure that the process chart at Annexe B should be re-designed to make it clearer and easier to follow;
- That the Council should ensure there is adequate resource – both financial and practical – to ensure the s.19 approach and Pathway of Action can function adequately;

## **28/25 HOME TO SCHOOL TRANSPORT POLICY**

(Agenda No. 6)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, attended accompanied by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and Stephen Good, Home to School Transport Programme Manager, to present the Home to School Transport Policy before it was to be submitted to Cabinet for its approval on 17 June 2025.

The Leader highlighted that this was the first consultation on the policy in ten years and reminded the Committee that, whilst a financial contribution from families for post-16 travel had been consulted on, it had been decided not to pursue this proposal.

The Programme Manager's presentation on Home to School Transport highlighted the public consultation undertaken between January and March 2025, addressing four key areas. The goal was to align the policy with the Department for Education's guidelines and to make it user-friendly for officers, parents, and schools. Out of 649 responses, many supported wording changes and improvements. However, there were objections to contribution charges due to the cost-of-living crisis, limited SEND resources, and potential educational barriers. The policy refresh aimed to simplify aspects without altering service eligibility or provision.

Members expressed concerns about the seeming rigidity of the home-to-school transport system, sharing experiences of using different transport methods for one family. They suggested that a more flexible and individual approach could save money. The Programme Manager agreed and said that the Council was considering personal transport budgets to provide flexibility. He also noted that offering budgets for parents to take their children to school could reduce transport costs and improve family integration.

Members raised concerns about the perceived unfairness in the county-wide policy and asked if officers were aware of where issues remain unresolved, as well as how often the policy was reviewed. The Programme Manager acknowledged recurring issues such as spare seats, split villages, and communication about transport changes. He mentioned ongoing efforts to address these through business-as-usual operations and closer collaboration with schools. The Deputy Director clarified that the policy was reviewed annually, unless changes in legislation necessitated earlier updates.

Members questioned the impact of transport policies on rural areas in Oxfordshire, highlighting the high cost of school buses and the removal of the spare seats scheme, which exacerbated inequalities and challenges for families in isolated villages. The Programme Manager acknowledged the challenges faced by rural communities and the need for broader integration across transport policies to ensure these areas were not isolated.

The Programme Manager mentioned that while the home-to-school transport policy covered statutory provisions, there was a need for wider community support and

better communication to mitigate the impact of changes. The Programme Manager also noted that the removal of the spare seats scheme had been a recurring issue, and efforts were being made to address it responsibly and ensure families were informed and supported during transitions.

Members inquired about the rising costs of the home-to-school transport service and the potential need for difficult decisions in the future. Members also requested information on the demographics of people using the transport scheme. The Deputy Director acknowledged the significant cost of the service, which was around £42 million annually, and the complexity of managing 3m transport transactions over a 38-week period. She emphasised the importance of getting children to school but recognised the need for broader discussions on how to use the funds more effectively.

The Leader added that the decision not to charge post-16 students was made because the potential revenue of £200,000 would not significantly impact the overall budget but would affect individual families. The Deputy Director mentioned that the demographics of people using the transport scheme could be provided in future discussions, as it was relevant to understanding the impact on different communities.

The Committee AGREED to the following actions:

- The Deputy Director to seek an answer on the bus being withdrawn in Risinghurst and respond to Cllr Phillips and inform the Committee.

The Committee AGREED to recommendations under the following headings:

- That the Council should work at pace to organise personal transport budgets with appropriate flexibility to take account of individual circumstances.
- That the Council should ensure regular review of the policy is to mean 'annual', subject to legislative changes.

## **29/25 DRAFT EOTAS POLICY** (Agenda No. 7)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, accompanied by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and Deborah Smit, Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion, presented the latest Draft Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) policy.

The Leader acknowledged the feedback from the working group and emphasised the importance of having a policy in place for EOTAS. She stressed the need to get the policy right and mentioned that while feedback was welcome, it was crucial to resolve the policy in a timely fashion. The Leader noted that the work on this policy has been ongoing for a year and expressed the desire to finalise it quickly.

The Deputy Director presented the draft policy and the draft parents' guide for EOTAS, noting that the parents' guide was still being worked on. She emphasised the importance of having a framework for officers, parents, families, and children to understand what EOTAS was and what it entailed. The policy aimed to ensure

fairness and transparency. The Deputy Director mentioned that the policy was modelled on good practices from other local authorities and recommended agreeing to the policy while accepting that it may need adjustments once implemented. She highlighted the urgency of having a policy to be compliant, as the lack of an EOTAS policy was noted in the 2023 SEND inspection.

Members inquired about the timeline for finalising the draft parents' guide and whether the Committee would have the opportunity to review the guide prior to its submission to the Cabinet. They also questioned the extent of co-production involved in developing the guide. The Deputy Director clarified that they were collaborating with the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum (OxPCF) to organise working sessions, with the goal of completing a final draft by the end of June. The Deputy Director further elaborated on the collaborative efforts with parents and carers, noting that the policy and guidance were being co-produced through approximately 10 meetings with various groups, including the EOTAS Support Group and OxPCF. Additionally, a listening event was held last September, and both health colleagues and an external lawyer had contributed to the process.

The Committee also sought clarification on which other Councils' practices were looked at when developing the EOTAS policy. The Deputy Director specifically cited, the modelled good practices of, Camden and Islington as examples.

The Committee discussed whether guidance should be written and presented at the same time as the policy or, alternatively, if the policy was required before guidance could be provided on the policy. The Committee discussed the importance of having the policy in place promptly to ensure compliance and transparency. It was agreed that the policy should be finalised quickly while allowing time for parent carers to provide input on the guidance.

Members raised concerns about the substantial increase in the number of children receiving EOTAS over the last few years and the high cost associated with it. The Deputy Director clarified that there were, at the time, 60 children and young people receiving EOTAS packages, with the total cost around £3-4 million. She explained that the average cost per child could be worked out, however the actual cost of each child/young person on an EOTAS package varied significantly depending on their individual needs, with some far below or above the average cost.

With the amount of money being spent on EOTAS packages, Members wanted more clarity on the monitoring section of the EOTAS policy, asking for specifics on how monitoring would be conducted and what should take place. The Deputy Director explained the monitoring aimed to ensure high-quality education for children and young people receiving EOTAS packages. Each alternative education provider was visited to verify the quality of education provided, ensuring they had appropriate safeguarding policies and were registered correctly. Monitoring included annual visits, due diligence checks, and ensuring providers deliver high-quality education.

The Committee followed up asking how the recipients' performance and progression under EOTAS packages were being monitored to ensure they were appropriate. The Deputy Director confirmed that the performance and progression of children in EOTAS packages were monitored as part of the annual review of their EHCPs. She



highlighted that the success of these packages was evident, mentioning that two young people on EOTAS packages had been offered places at the University of Oxford and the University of Durham.

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

- That the Council, if the draft policy is approved by Cabinet, should commit to co-producing the guidance in a timely fashion with it being reviewed by the Committee before it is submitted to Cabinet

### **30/25 WOODEATON MANOR SCHOOL UPDATE** (Agenda No. 8)

The Leader of the Council, Cllr Liz Leffman, presented an update on Woodeaton Manor School. The Leader was accompanied by Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Kate Reynolds, Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, and Deborah Smit, Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion.

The Deputy Director presented a comprehensive report on resolving the outstanding issues at Woodeaton Manor School, covering autumn 2023 to May 2025. However, she warned that the departure of several officers during 2023 affected the report's robustness. Initial concerns about student safety and the school's leadership were identified in summer 2023 by school improvement partners and communicated to the administration. The Grade II\* listed building posed safeguarding challenges due to insufficient investments. An Ofsted inspection rated the school as inadequate, leading to its mandated academisation by the year's end. In January 2025, the Council formed a service level agreement with Propeller Academy Trust for effective management. A monitoring visit in March 2025 showed significant operational improvements.

The Committee inquired about the current pupil outcomes at Woodeaton and what transitional support had been offered to the students. The Deputy Director responded that the leadership and management at the school, along with Propeller Academy Trust, have been providing significant support to the students. It was also mentioned that Ofsted noted substantial improvements in the school's operations.

The Committee inquired about accusations against Woodeaton's governing board, such as lack of investment and conflicts of interest. The Deputy Director stated that, following the foundation governing board's resignation in autumn 2023 and the school's forced academisation, an interim executive board was monitored monthly. In January 2025, a service level agreement with Propeller Academy Trust was established to enhance board capacity and support. Immediate actions were taken to address governance issues and ensure strong leadership. The Director confirmed ongoing Council efforts to monitor and support the school's leadership.

The Committee was concerned that the BBC had learned about Woodeaton's plans to move site before parents. The Deputy Director explained that the BBC's article had picked up the information when the agenda was published for this Committee. After learning about the article, the Council informed Propeller Academy Trust and the Interim Transition Board, who then updated parents and the community. The Deputy

Director confirmed that the Council always aimed to keep parents, and the community, informed about important developments, including delays in academisation due to site issues.

The Committee discussed the high staff turnover at Woodeaton, including the headteacher's departure, and asked about measures to prevent future staff losses impacting timetables. The Deputy Director stated that monthly meetings with the Interim Transition Board or headteacher and chair of governance ensured prompt issue resolution. She highlighted Woodeaton's unique complexity as the last foundation school in a listed building. The Assistant Director of SEND and Inclusion added that extra support such as speech therapy, educational psychology, and staff supervision aimed to stabilise the school and maintain pupils' education despite staff turnover.

The Deputy Director explained that the current site was not fit for purpose. The Council was working with property colleagues to identify suitable sites for relocation. However, she could not provide specific details or timelines due to the complexity of the process, which involved property, district councils, and planning permissions. The Director emphasised that the Council was committed to finding a suitable site that met the needs of the pupils and provided an appropriate 21st-century learning environment.

When asked about increased parental involvement at Woodeaton, the Deputy Director explained that the academisation process is managed by the Department for Education (DfE) and regional directors. The Council, due to current legislation, cannot involve parents in this process, which she regretted.

The Committee asked about the methods the Council used to identify issues in schools without solely relying on head teachers' self-reporting and how the Council ensured that no concerns were concealed within budgets. The Deputy Director explained that the Council conducted more thorough examinations of school budgets, assessing whether sufficient funds were allocated to necessary areas such as building maintenance. This process involved finance colleagues and contributed to strategy group meetings. She noted that this approach was intended to be more effective than previous practices in preventing hidden issues.

The Committee discussed the relative merits of conducting an investigation and decided against.

The Chair was keen to invite the Regional Schools Commissioner to a future meeting to discuss oversight of academies.

The Committee made no recommendations.

### **31/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN** (Agenda No. 9)

The Committee agreed to **NOTE** the forward plan and discuss fully the work programme at a subsequent meeting. The Director of Children Services encouraged

the Committee to engage in the wide range of children’s services, especially in the legislative changes in children’s services, adoption and corporate parenting.

The Chair also warned the Committee of a short item for the July meeting on School meals and services, led by Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer. The Committee **AGREED** to receive the item in July.

**32/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**  
(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker.

**33/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**  
(Agenda No. 11)

The Committee **NOTED** the draft Cabinet response on the Local Area Partnership SEND update.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....

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## Divisions Affected- All

### Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

11 July 2025

### School Catering Service – Proposed change of provision for the schools.

### Report by Director of Property and Assets

## RECOMMENDATION

1. The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to:

i) Consider the report, particularly the options put forward for consideration, and agree any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising

## Executive Summary

2. Following the collapse of Carillion in 2018 the County Council had to return a number of service functions back in-house. Included in this was the provision of Primary school meals to some sixty schools across the County.
3. Since the function became an inhouse delivery service, the catering service has struggled to have a financial breakeven position to deliver the service, as set out in the body of the options paper in Annex 1.
4. For the recent 2024/25 financial year, by implementing some changes such as reducing the cost of meal production, moving from fresh to frozen ingredients, the position has resulted in a net underspend against budget of c£296k, this represents a c£322k improvement against the outturn position, this position will continue in 2025/26 as shown in the forecast 2025/26 in the body of the options paper in Annex 1.

## Exempt Information

5. Information in the Annex 1 to this report is supplied in commercial confidence and disclosure would prejudice the commercial position of the parties involved. It would also prejudice the position of the authority's investments to the detriment of the Council's ability to properly discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.

## Catering Current Position - Background

6. Historically, the catering service has been expected to generate sufficient income to cover all expenditures, operating as a traded service. However, year on year this has become increasingly difficult to meet the financial goal.
7. The funding from the government for FSM (Free School Meals) and UIFSM (Universal Free School Meals) meals has remained largely static. It has not kept pace with increases in the cost of providing the service, nor does it reflect the wider value of school meal provision (APSE, Local Authority Education Service 'More than just a service' report 2023)
8. Since the introduction of devolved budgets, the lack of ringfencing of the funding has not guaranteed all allocated funding has been shared with the catering provider. (APSE, Local Authority Education Service 'More than just a service' report 2023)
9. The true cost of the Covid pandemic has far outstripped any funding provided, and the closure of schools to all but vulnerable pupils resulted in the additional significant loss of paid meal income (APSE, Local Authority Education Service 'More than just a Service' report 2023)#
10. The inflationary cost of staple ingredients, energy bills and above-inflation wage increases has ensured the gap between budgets and funding is ever widening. Brexit and the war in Ukraine have exacerbated the situation. (APSE, Local Authority Education Service 'More than just a service' report 2023)
11. The number of Free school-eligible pupils has increased significantly between pre-COVID and the cost-of-living crisis. In Oxfordshire alone, an additional 6,000 pupils were eligible for Free School Meals in Jan 2024 compared to January 2019 – this represents a 45% increase in eligibility and serves as a reminder as to how crucial a part, school meals are playing in the lives of our residents. (Oxfordshire School Census data Jan 2019 and Jan 2024)
12. The school meal market within the County (and indeed, across the country) has become fragmented with private caterers' primary focus being on the 'bottom line' which has negatively impacted smaller and more rural schools. There is a distinct lack of an effective monitoring mechanism and little opportunity to enforce standards, thus our service is operating in a competitive market with little accountability and public money is spent without transparency nor scrutiny. Therefore, the catering service is not operating on a level playing field regarding tendering for new contracts in comparison to the private sector market. This has resulted in the service experiencing significant and unsustainable financial challenge, that cannot continue if the service is to remain viable. Therefore, the service has no alternative but to increase meal prices to at least move towards a break-even position.
13. As an interim measure, effective of 1<sup>st</sup> May 2024, the paid pupil meal price has risen to £2.55 (with Universal Free School Meals (UIFSM) and Free School

Meals (FSM) prices remaining at £2.53 and £2:55 respectively). However, this will be nowhere near enough to achieve a breakeven position for the service, and it was therefore necessary to increase all school meal prices to £2.90 per meal effective from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2025, which was communicated to all schools in 2024/25. With the two increases there will be further price increases necessary in the new financial year if the Council is to achieve a breakeven position.

14. As a Local Authority (LA), the Council is not unusual in struggling to achieve a break-even position and benchmarking of other Authorities demonstrates that the Council still lags well behind other authorities' charging at April 2025 price. That said, the Council recognises that it will need to take a stepped approach to catch up.

## **Local engagement**

15. We have engaged with school's forum in June 2025 to inform the schools forum of the current challenges faced and what the potential options are likely to be, following presentation to scrutiny committee the paper will be taken to cabinet for a decision on the catering service moving forward. Following this the schools will be engaged and advised of the next steps and how this will impact provision of school meals will impact each school.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

16. The process will ensure we fall in line with our financial priorities to the county and ensure the continuity of healthy and nutritious school meals to the children of Oxfordshire. It is in line with our priorities to 'Tackle inequalities' in Oxfordshire and 'Prioritise the health and wellbeing of our residents'.

## **Financial Implications**

17. The increase to £2.90 for each pupil meal, will impact on schools' finance if the funding for FSM and UIFSM meals remains static and will not achieve a breakeven position for OCC.
18. Whilst school meal industry bodies (LACA and APSE) continue to lobby parliament to increase the funding (particularly as meals for pupils not in school were funded at £3.00 per meal during Covid) there has been no word from central government as to if, or when, this might increase.
19. Again, OCC are not alone in increasing prices beyond funding levels, with both other authorities and the private sector forced to do the same to avoid significant losses in the provision of a school meal service
20. In addition to meal price increases identified above, the service is working hard to reduce expenditure by.
  - continuing to drive better pricing through their supply chain.

- Menu planning which focuses not only on content and quality but on reducing the overall cost per meal.
  - Reducing hours in kitchens where this will not impact on service quality.
  - Robustly managing sickness and overtime to keep at levels to a minimum.
  - Adopting best practice identified through networking with other LA's
21. The reality of the situation is that any cost pressures going forward cannot be mitigated.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner  
[Drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Legal Implications**

22. There are no further legal implications at this stage beyond those set out in Annex 1. Further consideration will be required once a recommendation is agreed.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar, Head of Legal and Governance  
[Jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:Jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

23. There are no new staff implications as the current funding has been identified via the service's respective revenue budget.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

24. There are no equality or inclusion implications at this stage. From the engagement to date with the potential options for the direction of the service there is full support to meet the Equality and Inclusivity Policies, and this will be fully determined before process is commenced which may impact staff.

## **Sustainability Implications**

25. There are no sustainability implications for the service at this stage, this will be fully determined following a decision on the direction of the service.



## Risk Management

26. The current and potential risks are outlined within the detailed paper in Annex 1 however the key risk is financial and sustainability of the service currently operating at a deficit for the previous 4 years.

## Consultations

27. The Council engaged with external catering consultants in February 2024 to review and recommend improvements and changes to the operation, this resulted in improved financial and operational performance through 24/25.
28. The Council has also engaged with School's Forum in June 25, to advise of the potential options for the catering service.

Vic Kurzeja – Director of Property & Assets  
[vic.kurzeja@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:vic.kurzeja@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Annex:1 Project Mandate Document – **Exempt**

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of the Local Government Act 1972.

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**Divisions Affected-All**  
**Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**11<sup>th</sup> July 2025**

**Corporate Cleaning Service – Proposed outsource of in-house  
cleaning service**

**Report by Director of Property and Assets**

## **RECOMMENDATION**

**1. The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**

- a) Consider the report, particularly the options put forward for consideration in respect of:
  - i) Continuing to operate an in-house cleaning service for large corporate sites alongside the outsourced provision of sites requiring less than 25 hours cleaning per week (outsourced in April 2024) and
  - ii) Carrying out a tender exercise in line with OCC Contract Procedure Rules and the relevant procurement legislation to outsource the cleaning of corporate sites and
  - iii) Agree any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet

## **Executive Summary**

- 1. The cleaning service was transferred to OCC following the collapse of Carillion in 2018, approximately 125 staff were transferred back to OCC covering all corporate buildings across the county. The service has faced considerable challenges both operational and financial since this period. In particular there are ongoing challenges with sickness, absence and vacancies. As a result there is continuing pressure on the service to meet the operational requirements leading to additional operational costs to meet the operational need.

## **Exempt Information**

- 3. Information in the Annex 1 to this report is supplied in commercial confidence and disclosure would prejudice the commercial position of the parties involved. It would also prejudice the position of the authority's investments to the

detriment of the Council's ability to properly discharge its fiduciary and other duties as a public authority.

## **Cleaning Current Position - Background**

4. The current position is that OCC operates a hybrid model, directly employing circa 73 (this not FTE this is the number of posts) staff including 2 Area Managers and part funding the Operational Manager, for the delivery of cleaning services to the corporate estate and schools with an agreed Service Level Agreement.
5. The remainder is provided by an outsourced company, Parker Contract Cleaning Limited, with approximately 45 staff covering. This is delivered via a 3 year contract for cleaning services to all corporate buildings with a requirement of cleaning services equating to less than 25 hours per site per week. This is currently on track to meet both operational and financial targets.
6. Following current budget and operational challenges and the success of the previous outsourced exercise there is a need to review and realign the cleaning service therefore two operating models have been reviewed and a preferred model proposed. The proposals are:
  - a) Continue to operate an inhouse cleaning service for large corporate sites alongside the outsourced provision of sites requiring less than 25 hours cleaning per week (outsourced in April 2024).
  - b) Carry out a tender exercise in line with OCC procurement rules to outsource the cleaning of corporate sites.

## **Local engagement**

7. The Council engaged with School's Forum in June 2025 to inform the Schools Forum of the current challenges faced and what the potential options are likely to be. Following presentation to the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny committee the paper will be taken to Cabinet for a decision on the cleaning service moving forward. Following this the schools will be engaged and advised of the next steps and how this will impact provision of school cleaning services.

## **Corporate Policies and Priorities**

8. The cleaning service aligns with the following corporate policies and priorities:
  1. Tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire.
  2. Prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents.

## Financial Implications

9. The current service is operating at an overspend and is anticipated to continue in its current operating model. A decision to outsource the remaining service would deliver financial savings on current budgetary spend and deliver agreed savings outlined in the approved paper.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson  
Strategic Finance Business Partner  
Drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

## Legal Implications

### 10. Procurement

The proposed outsourcing of the cleaning services will need to be carried out in accordance with the Council's Contract Procedure Rules and relevant procurement legislation (this may either be a new tender under the Procurement Act 2023 or a call-off under a framework under the Public Contracts Regulations) because it will be classified as a service contract with an estimated value in excess of the £214,904 (inclusive of VAT) procurement threshold. Legal Services will be engaged in the preparation of the contract documentation.

### 11. Employment/Staffing

Any transfer of council employees to a new cleaning contractor would be subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

Jayne Pringle  
Head of Law & Legal Business Partner (Contracts & Conveyancing)  
[jayne.pringle@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jayne.pringle@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

Jay Akbar  
Head of Legal & Governance  
[jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## **Staff Implications**

12. As referenced above, any transfer of council employees to a new cleaning contractor would be subject to the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) Regulations 2006.

## **Equality & Inclusion Implications**

13. There are no equality or inclusion implications at this stage. From the engagement to date with the potential options for the direction of the service there is full commitment to meet the Equality and Inclusivity Policies, and this will be fully determined before any process is commenced which may impact staff.

## **Sustainability Implications**

14. There are no sustainability implications for the service at this stage, this will be fully assessed and determined following a decision on the direction of the service.

## **Risk Management**

15. The current and potential risks are outlined within the detailed paper in Annex 1 however the key risk is financial and sustainability of the service.

## **Consultations**

16. There have been no consultations to date however once a decision is reached consultations with the Union will begin.

Vic Kurzeja – Director of Property & Assets [Member of SLT]  
vic.kurzeja@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Annex:1 Project Mandate Document - **Confidential**

Contact Officer: Anthony Hulsman Head of Operation (FM)  
anthony.hulsman@oxfordshire.gov.uk

July 2025



By virtue of paragraph(s) 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A  
of the Local Government Act 1972.

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**Work Programme 2025/26  
Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

**COMMITTEE BUSINESS**

Topic	Relevant strategic priorities	Purpose	Type	Report Leads
<b>11 July 2025</b>				
School meals service and school cleaning service	Work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit; Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.	To ensure the services are high-quality, cost-effective, equitable, and support a safe, healthy learning environment for all pupils.	Overview and Scrutiny	Vic Kurzeja, Lorna Baxter
Work-planning				
<b>26 September 2025</b>				
tbc				
Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system	To consider the annual report; to ensure accountability and improvement.	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Senay Nidai

Oxfordshire Youth Justice Annual Plan	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential; prioritise the health and wellbeing of residents; support carers and the social care system; tackle inequalities	To consider the annual report before it is presented to Full Council; to ensure accountability and improvement.	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Delia Mann, Jessie Dobson
		<b>26 November 2025</b>		
tbc				
To be confirmed during work planning session				
		<b>27 February 2026</b>		
tbc				
s.19 Monitoring Report	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.	To ensure accountability and improvement	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Kate Reynolds
		<b>27 March 2026</b>		
tbc				
EOTAS Policy Review	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential.	To review progress of policy implementation	Overview and Scrutiny	Lisa Lyons, Kate Reynolds

**SUB GROUP / WORKING GROUP**

<b>SUB GROUPS / WORKING GROUPS</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Relevant strategic priorities</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Members</b>

**BRIEFINGS FOR MEMBER INFORMATION**

<b>BRIEFINGS</b>				
<b>Name</b>	<b>Relevant strategic priorities</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Outcomes</b>	<b>Members</b>
Personal Budgets	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential	To be briefed on funding pressures.	To identify any areas that need to be referred to the Committee	Members of the Committee
Inclusive Schools Finance	Create Opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential	To understand and analyse pressures within schools.	To identify any areas that need to be referred to the Committee	Members of the Committee

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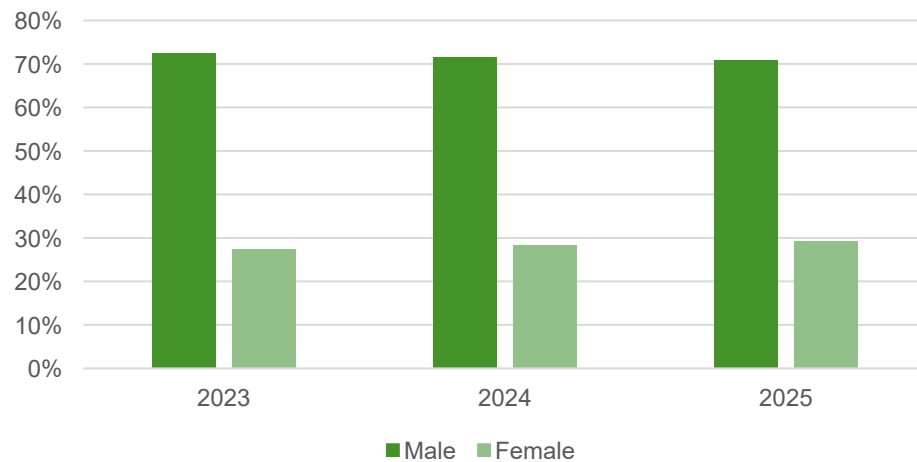


# Characteristics of children and young people in Oxfordshire with an EHCP

	2023	2024	2025
<b>No. EHCPs in Oxfordshire</b>	5,427	6,420	7,307

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**Gender (%)**



**Ethnicity (%)**

	2023	2024	2025
<b>Asian</b>	5.6%	5.8%	5.6%
<b>Black</b>	3.2%	3.0%	3.1%
<b>Mixed</b>	7.3%	7.8%	7.9%
<b>White</b>	78.7%	79.0%	79.1%
<b>Other</b>	1.2%	1.2%	1.2%
<b>Unknown</b>	4.1%	3.2%	3.2%

Source: SEN2 Data Collection



# Characteristics of pupils in EOTAS (as at 25 June 25)

	Total	59	%
Sex	Male	36	61 %
	Female	23	39%
Ethnicity	Asian	2	3%
	Mixed	7	12%
	White	48	81 %
	Unknown	2	3%

# EHCP Appeals and Tribunals with Mediation

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<b>Calendar year</b>	<b>2022</b>	<b>2023</b>	<b>2024</b>
<b>Total Appeals</b>	230	343	389
<b>With Mediation</b>	37	122	127
<b>With Mediation (%)</b>	16%	36%	33%

# Complaints received by the LGSCO - Education and Children's Services

Complaints	2022/23	2023/24	2024/25
Received	76	75	56
Upheld	29	30	17
Upheld (%)	38%	40%	30%

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**SPECIAL EDUCATIONAL NEEDS IN OXFORDSHIRE (SCHOOL CENSUS DATA)**
**(DATA PUBLISHED – 12<sup>TH</sup> JUNE 2025)**

This publication combines information from the school census (state-funded schools), school level annual school census (independent schools) and general hospital school census on pupils with special educational needs (SEN).

This briefing relates to pupils at schools in Oxfordshire and differs from the EHC plans briefing which relates to children and young people aged 0-25 with an EHC plan maintained by Oxfordshire regardless of place of education.

<https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/special-educational-needs-in-england/2024-25>

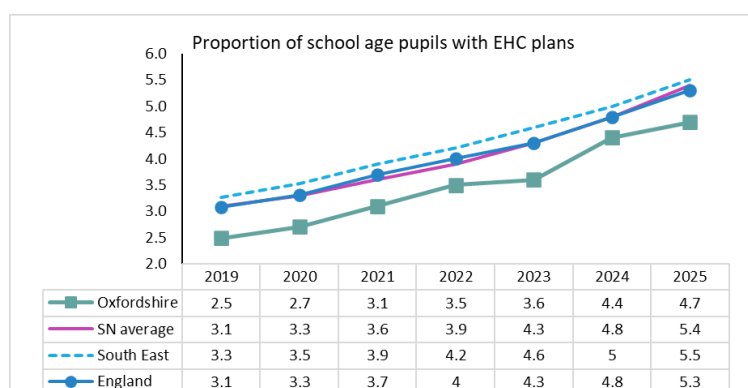
School aged population with  
EHC plans  
**4.7%**  
England – 5.3%

School aged population with  
SEN Support  
**17.3%**  
England – 14.2%

<b>Headlines</b>	<b>Oxfordshire</b>	<b>Statistical Neighbours</b>	<b>South East</b>	<b>National</b>
<b>% of school aged population with EHC plans</b>	4.7	5.4	5.5	5.3
Compared to 2023	4.4	4.8	5.0	4.8
Percentage increase on last year	+0.3%pt	+0.6%pts	+0.5%pt	+0.5%pt
National Rank from 152 LAs (quartile)	122 <sup>nd</sup> (4 <sup>th</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank – (out of 11)	10 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-
<b>% of school aged population with SEN support</b>	17.3	14.0	14.5	14.2
Compared to 2023	16.3	13.7	13.8	13.6
Difference from previous year	+1.0%pts	+0.3%pts	+0.7%pts	+0.6%pts
National Rank from 152 LAs (quartile)	8 <sup>th</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	1 <sup>st</sup>	-	-	-
<b>% primary school pupils with EHC plans</b>	3.8	3.7	3.5	3.5
Compared to 2023	3.3	3.3	3.0	3.0
Difference from previous year	+0.5%pts	+0.4%pts	+0.5%pts	+0.5%pts
National Rank (quartile)	70 <sup>th</sup> (2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	4 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-

<b>% primary school pupils with SEN support</b>	16.2	14.6	14.4	14.8
Compared to 2023	15.5	14.0	13.7	14.1
Difference from previous year	+0.7%pts	+0.6%pts	+0.7%pts	+0.7%pts
National Rank (quartile)	38 <sup>th</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	2 <sup>nd</sup>	-	-	-
<b>% secondary school pupils with EHC Plans</b>	3.5	3.5	3.2	3.1
Compared to 2023	3.0	3.1	2.9	2.7
Difference from previous year	+0.5%pts	+0.4%pts	+0.3%pts	+0.4%pts
National Rank (quartile)	54 <sup>th</sup> (2 <sup>nd</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	6 <sup>th</sup>	-	-	-
<b>% secondary school pupils with SEN support</b>	17.1	13.2	13.5	13.4
Compared to 2022	15.9	12.6	12.8	12.9
Difference from previous year	+1.2%pts	+0.6%pts	+0.7%pts	+0.5%pts
National Rank (quartile)	11 <sup>th</sup> (1 <sup>st</sup> quartile)	-	-	-
SN Rank (out of 11)	1 <sup>st</sup>	-	-	-

### PROPORTION OF SCHOOL AGE PUPILS WITH EHC PLAN



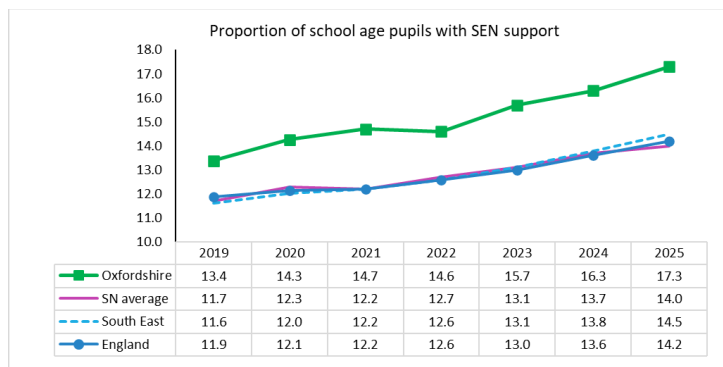
*This includes state funded schools (nursery, primary, secondary, special), non-maintained special schools, independent schools and pupil referral units)*

4.7% (5,642) of pupils at schools in Oxfordshire have an education, health and care (EHC) plan as at January 2025. This is an increase of 0.3%pts (394 pupils) on January 2024 and an increase of 2.2%pts (2,830 pupils) since January 2019.

Most of these plans will be maintained by Oxfordshire, others will be maintained by a pupil's home local authority.

Oxfordshire is placed in the 4th quartile nationally for this measure – ranked 122<sup>nd</sup> out of 152 local authorities, meaning Oxfordshire has a lower proportion of school population with EHC plans.

## PROPORTION OF SCHOOL AGE PUPILS WITH SEN SUPPORT



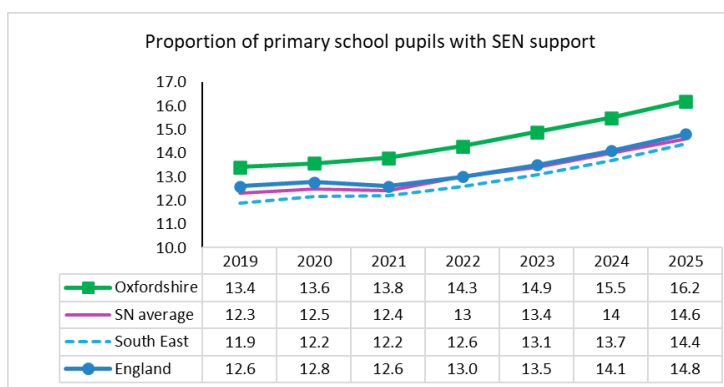
*This includes state funded schools (nursery, primary, secondary, special), non-maintained special schools, independent schools and pupil referral units)*

17.3% (20,677) of pupils in Oxfordshire schools have SEN support but no EHC plan as at January 2025. This is an increase from 16.3% of pupils (18,666) in January 2024.

Oxfordshire has the 8th highest proportion of pupils with SEN support in schools, out of 152 local authorities.

The proportion of pupils in Oxfordshire schools with SEN support has increased by 1.0%pts since 2024, higher than the 0.6%pt increase reported nationally.

## PUPILS WITH SEN SUPPORT IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS

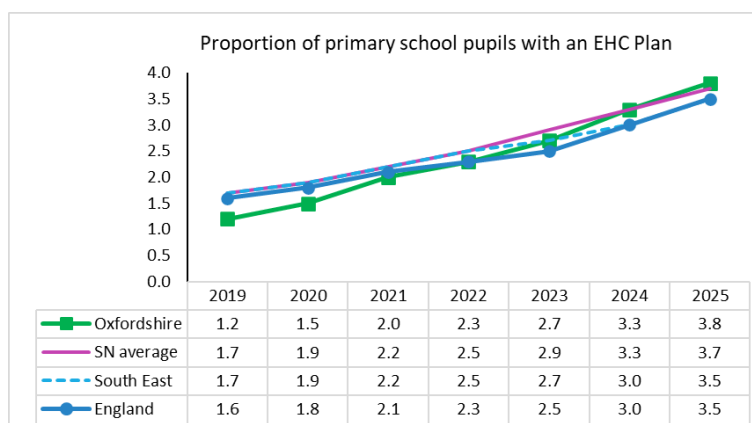


16.2% (8,976) of pupils at Oxfordshire primary schools were SEN support in January 2025. This is an increase from 15.5% (up 366 pupils) in 2024.

Oxfordshire continues to have a notably higher proportion of SEN Support pupils in primary schools than that reported nationally.

Oxfordshire ranks 38th out of 152 local authorities for this measure and 2<sup>nd</sup> within the statistical neighbour group.

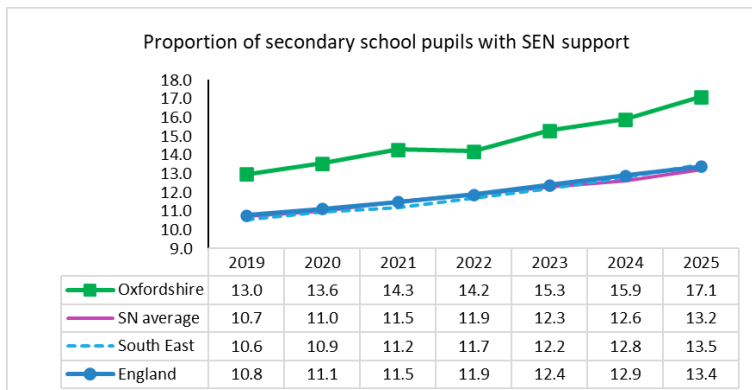
## PUPILS WITH EHC PLANS IN PRIMARY SCHOOLS



3.8% (2,078) of pupils at Oxfordshire primary schools had an EHCP in January 2025. This is an increase from 3.3% (up 263 pupils) in 2024.

There has been a 0.5%pt increase in the proportion of pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire primary schools. This matches the increase reported nationally (0.5%pts)

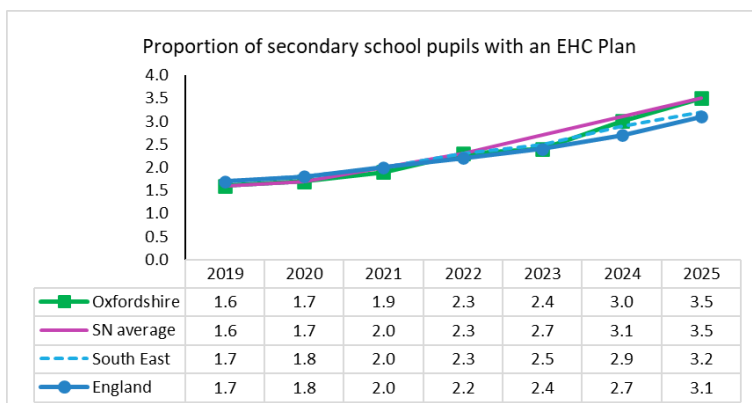
## PUPILS WITH SEN SUPPORT IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS



17.1% (7611) of pupils at Oxfordshire secondary schools had SEN support in January 2025. This is an increase of 1.2%pts from 15.9% (up 611 pupils) in 2024. The rate of growth of this pupil group in Oxfordshire slowed between 2021 and 2022 but is now continuing to rise.

Oxfordshire has the 11<sup>th</sup> highest proportion of secondary school SEN Support pupils out of 152 local authorities and highest within the statistical neighbour group

## PUPILS WITH EHC PLANS IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS



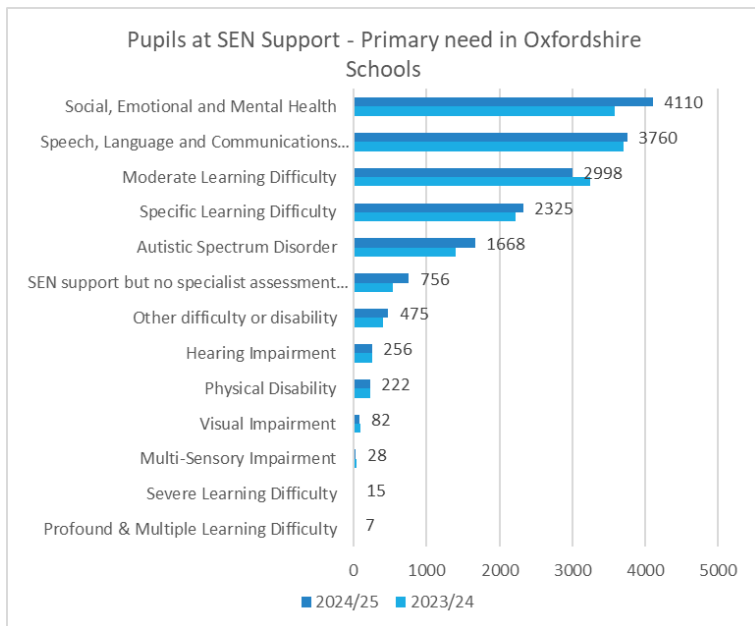
3.5% (1,567) of pupils at Oxfordshire secondary schools had an EHCP in January 2025. This is an increase from 3.0% (up 250 pupils) in 2024.

Between 2019 and 2021 the proportion of secondary school pupils with an EHCP in Oxfordshire was below the national average, since then the County has come into line with and is now above the national average.

Oxfordshire is ranked 54<sup>th</sup> out of 152 Local Authorities for the proportion of pupils with EHCPs in secondary schools and 6<sup>th</sup> out of 11 statistical neighbours

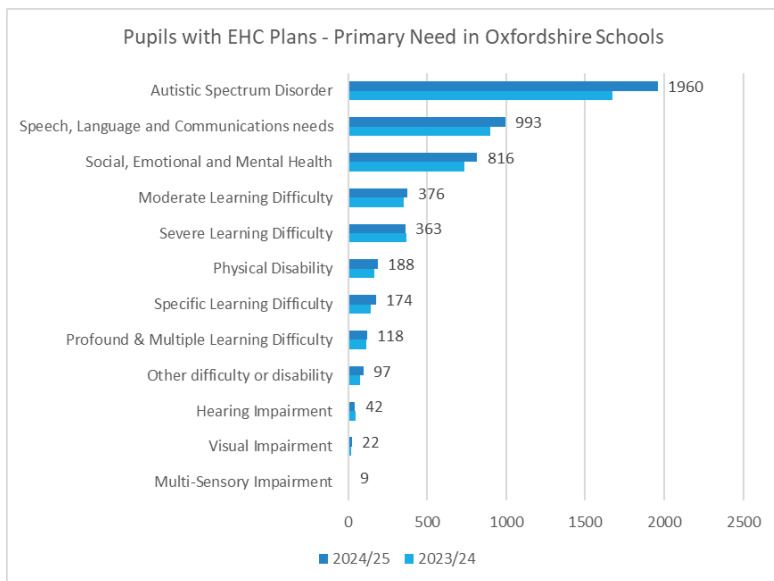


## PRIMARY NEED



The most common type of primary need for pupils with SEN support in Oxfordshire schools is social, emotional and mental health with 4,110 pupils (24.6% of all pupils with SEN support). This is above the national average (23.6%).

Nationally the most common primary need for pupils with SEN support is speech, language and communication needs (25.7%), followed by social, emotional and mental health needs (23.6%)



Autistic spectrum disorder continues to account for the highest proportion of primary need among pupils with an EHC plan, both within Oxfordshire schools (37.9%) as well as nationally (33.6%). The second highest EHCP primary need for pupils in Oxfordshire schools is speech, language and communication needs (19.2%), this mirrors the picture nationally.

Over half of pupils with an EHC plan in Oxfordshire schools had either autistic spectrum disorder or SLCN (57.1%).

The table below allows comparisons to be drawn between primary need for pupils with an EHCP and at SEN Support in Oxfordshire against national. It is possible to see that the proportion of children with an EHCP and a primary need of ASD is higher in Oxfordshire (37.9%) than the national average (33.6%).

For pupils at SEN Support, in Oxfordshire the proportion with a primary need of moderate learning difficulty is 3.5%pts above the national average (Oxfordshire 17.9%, national 14.4%)

	Oxfordshire 2024/25				National 2024/25			
	SEN Support		EHCP		SEN Support		EHCP	
	#	%	#	%	#	%	#	%
Speech, Language and Communications needs	3760	22.5	993	19.2	304021	25.7	92004	20.7
Social, Emotional and Mental Health	4110	24.6	816	15.8	279230	23.6	71304	16.0
Moderate Learning Difficulty	2998	17.9	376	7.3	170228	14.4	34755	7.8
Specific Learning Difficulty	2325	13.9	174	3.4	160490	13.6	19064	4.3
Autistic Spectrum Disorder	1668	10.0	1960	37.9	114772	9.7	149217	33.6
SEN support but no specialist assessment of type of need	756	4.5	-	-	57779	4.9	-	-
Other difficulty or disability	475	2.8	97	1.9	40923	3.5	8954	2.0
Hearing Impairment	256	1.5	42	0.8	17396	1.5	6368	1.4
Physical Disability	222	1.3	188	3.6	21085	1.8	14865	3.3
Visual Impairment	82	0.5	22	0.4	9544	0.8	3921	0.9
Multi-Sensory Impairment	28	0.2	9	0.2	3278	0.3	1352	0.3
Severe Learning Difficulty	15	0.1	363	7.0	1859	0.2	31271	7.0
Profound & Multiple Learning Difficulty	7	0.0	118	2.3	695	0.1	9911	2.2
Total	16705		5172		1181665		444419	

Blue shading denotes Oxfordshire is below the national average.

Green shading denotes Oxfordshire is above the national average.

Oxfordshire's statistical neighbours are:

Bracknell Forest; Buckinghamshire; Cambridgeshire; Gloucestershire; Hampshire; Hertfordshire; South Gloucestershire; West Berkshire; West Sussex; Wiltshire

**Contact:**

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Zaheer Ahmed, Interim Head of School Improvement, [zaheer.ahmed@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:zaheer.ahmed@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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V1 16/06/25

**Recommendation Tracker  
Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

<b>KEY</b>	<b>Due to Cabinet</b>	<b>With Cabinet</b>	<b>Complete</b>
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**Recommendations:**

Meeting Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
28-Mar-25	Report of the Virtual School	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.	Lisa Lyons; Kate Reynolds; Clare Pike	<b>Accepted</b>  See response in item 8
		2. That the Council, in subsequent annual reports of the Virtual School, should report in more detail on exclusions including informal internal processes.		<b>Partially Accepted</b>  See response in item 8

KEY	Due to Cabinet	With Cabinet	Complete
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Meeting date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
28-Mar-25	Update of Children's Homes	1. 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.	Lisa Lyons; Jean Kelly; Charlotte Davey	Presented to Cabinet on 17 <sup>th</sup> June 2025

**Action Tracker**  
**Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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<b>KEY</b>	<b>Delayed</b>	<b>In progress</b>	<b>Complete</b>
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**Actions:**

Meeting date	Item	Action	Lead	Update/response
28-Feb-25	Revised Home to School Transport & Post 16 Travel Policies for Consultation	Officers would discover what happened to the Cabinet Advisory Group and initiative for special schools to manage their own transport and report their findings back to the Committee.	Richard Doney	In Progress
		The Home to School Transport programme Manager committed to checking which specific Youth Parliaments were involved in the consultation and how they would be engaged.	Stephen Good	In Progress

**Recommendation Update Tracker  
Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, [richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

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<b>KEY</b>	<b>Update Pending</b>	<b>Update in Item</b>	<b>Updated</b>
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Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
25-Mar-25	Draft EOTAS	1. That the Council should re-write the draft EOTAS policy by no later than the end of February 2025 and that it, as well as the accompanying guidance, should be coproduced and that external experts should be invited to participate in that process.	Lisa Lyons; Kate Reynolds;	Update in item, see "Draft EOTAS Policy" on 13 <sup>th</sup> June 2025
		2. That the Council, in tandem with rewriting its draft EOTAS policy, should also write a co-produced Alternative Provision policy.	Joanna Goodey	Update in item, see "Draft EOTAS Policy" on 13 <sup>th</sup> June 2025
17-Jun-25	Local Area Partnership SEND Update	The Council will publish the Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) as well as the RAG Rated Priority Action Plan Tracker and ensure they are accessible to the public.	Lisa Lyons; Kate Reynolds;	Progress update to be provided
		The Council will set out how the views of the SEND Youth Forum, and its members, will be taken into	Matthew Tait	Progress update to be provided

KEY	Update Pending	Update in Item	Updated
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Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
		account and how they will be presented, including any consultation prior to the publication of any reports about the Forum.		

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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:** **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:**

As Acting Head of the Virtual School and author of the presented report, I welcome the Committee's engagement and thoughtful recommendations. Thank you for the opportunity to respond. I look forward to continuing our shared commitment to improving outcomes for children in our care.

My response to the two recommendations is outlined below:

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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

### Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
<p>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.</p>	<p>Accepted</p>	<p>I fully support this recommendation. The Virtual School will continue to work closely with governance leads and social care colleagues to ensure that governors and social workers are well-informed about their responsibilities as corporate parents. We will strengthen our training offer and communication channels to promote the role of the Virtual School and the importance of educational outcomes for children in our care.</p>
<p>2. That the Council, in subsequent annual reports of the Virtual School, should report in more detail on exclusions including informal internal processes.</p>	<p>Partially accepted</p>	<p>I acknowledge the Committee's concern and agree that greater transparency is essential. While data on unlawful exclusions is not collected through statutory data returns, the Virtual School will work with schools and performance data colleagues to improve the granularity of reporting on exclusions, where possible. We are committed to working collaboratively with colleagues across the school system to challenge unlawful practices, promote best practice and ensure that every child - wherever they reside - feels a sense of belonging and is supported to thrive in school.</p>