

County Council

8 July 2025

Agenda



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

To: Members of the County COUNCIL

Notice of a Meeting of the County Council

Tuesday, 8 July 2025 at 10.30 am

Council Chamber - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND

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

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Reeves".

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

June 2025

Committee Officer: **Democratic Services**
E-mail: CommitteesDemocraticServices@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. Minutes (Pages 1 - 8)

To approve the minutes of the Annual Council meeting held on 20 May 2025 (**CC1a**) and the minutes of the Extraordinary Council Meeting also on 20 May 2025 (**CC1b**) and to receive information arising from them.

2. Apologies for Absence

3. Declarations of Interest - see guidance note

Members are reminded that they must declare their interests orally at the meeting and specify (a) the nature of the interest and (b) which items on the agenda are the relevant items. This applies also to items where members have interests by virtue of their membership of a district council in Oxfordshire.

4. Official Communications

5. Appointments (Pages 9 - 12)

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

This report notifies Council of nominations received from the political group leaders and given effect by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer on 28 May 2025 under a delegation in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

The Council is RECOMMENDED to note the appointments listed in paragraph 7 of this report to

- the Corporate Parenting Panel
- Oxfordshire County Council and Employees Joint Consultative Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council and Teachers Joint Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council Joint Consultative Committee for Uniformed Members of the Fire Service

6. Petitions and Public Address

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting, or present a petition, can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection. Requests must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting i.e., 9am on Thursday 3 July 2025. Requests to speak should be sent to committeesdemocraticservices@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 9am on the day of the meeting. Written submissions should be no longer than 1 A4 sheet.

7. Questions with Notice from Members of the Public

The deadline to submit questions is 9am, five working days before the meeting i.e. 9am Tuesday 1 July 2025.

8. Questions with Notice from Members of the Council

9. Report of the Cabinet (Pages 13 - 20)

Report from the Leader of the Council.

The report summarises the decisions from the Cabinet meetings on 20 March 2025, 25 March 2025, 22 April 2025 and 17 June 2025.

10. Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2024/25 (Pages 21 - 50)

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

The Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is under a constitutional duty to prepare an annual report. That report is set out in Annex 1 and documents the breadth and depth of the Committee's work over the 2024/25 municipal year.

Council is RECOMMENDED to: -

- a) Receive and note the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (JHOSC) Annual Report set out in Annex 1.**

11. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25 (Pages 51 - 82)

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Within the Council's Constitution at Part 6.2 paragraph 4 (viii) the overview and scrutiny committees are given the right to submit an annual report. This is given effect through an Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

The Council is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Receive the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.**

12. Appointment of Independent Members of the Audit & Governance Committee (To Follow)

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

At its meeting on 11 July 2023, Council approved the creation of the roles of two Independent Members of the Audit and Governance Committee. This report is to propose appointments to the two positions.

13. Appointments to and Formation of the Independent Remuneration Panel (To Follow)

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

This report is to provide details of the arrangements for the forthcoming review of members' allowances to be completed in the current Council Year 2025/26 and implemented from 1 April 2026.

14. Councillors Parental Leave Policy (Pages 83 - 92)

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

This report presents a policy outlining councillors' entitlements to Parental Leave, which includes maternity, paternity, shared parental, and adoption leave.

Council is RECOMMENDED to approve a parental leave policy for councillors, ensuring support for new parents and best practice in local governance. The policy includes provisions for temporary cover and reflects the council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity among elected officials.

15. Presentation of scroll to Alderman Bob Johnston (Pages 93 - 94)

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

The Extraordinary Council meeting on 20 May 2025 approved the appointment of former Councillor Bob Johnston as Alderman. As Alderman Johnston was unable to attend on that day, Council agreed to defer the presentation of the scroll to this meeting.

Council is RECOMMENDED to note

- a) **the conferral of the title of Honorary Alderman, under section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, on Mr Bob Johnston at the Extraordinary Meeting on 20 May 2025 in recognition of his significant contribution to the Council in particular and public service in general;**
- b) **that Alderman Johnston was unable to attend the conferral meeting due to holidays; and**
- c) **that Council agreed to defer the presentation of the scroll until its next meeting on 8 July 2025 so that Members would have the opportunity to pay tribute.**

MOTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

WOULD MEMBERS PLEASE NOTE THAT ANY AMENDMENTS TO MOTIONS WITH NOTICE MUST BE PRESENTED TO THE PROPER OFFICER IN WRITING BY 9.00 AM ON THE FRIDAY BEFORE THE MEETING

16. Motion from Councillor Jane Hanna

Council notes with deep concern the failure of successive governments to address the crisis in Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) Provision.

Councils across the country are grappling with soaring high needs deficits, which the Local Government Association (LGA) predicts will exceed £5 billion nationally by next year.

Over half the councils providing these services warned they would face effective bankruptcy when the statutory override for SEND deficits was to expire in 2026. The extension to 2028 has not solved the underlying problem.

Between 2020 and 2024, Oxfordshire County Council's deficit on the 'Dedicated Schools Grant' was £46 million. This increased to £85m at the end of financial year 2024-25 and is budgeted to reach £127m by the end of financial year 2025-26.

Oxfordshire saw a 27% increase in requests for Education and Health Care Plans (EHCPs) during 2023/24 with an increase of 18% of approved EHCPs. These increases continue upward.

The LGA says that the current SEND system is "not working for anyone in it". The Spending Review once again failed to provide clarity on how the Government will address these mounting deficits.

The announced increase in core school funding amounts to just a 1.1% uplift - insufficient to keep pace with inflation and rising pay costs in schools.

The Council asks the leader to write to the Chancellor, Rachel Reeves MP, urging her to set out urgently how the Government will eliminate high needs deficits and deliver a SEND system that works for children, families and councils alike.

17. Motion from Councillor Liz Brighthouse

The Children's Society notes that transport poverty exacerbates other inequalities, with children from low-income families potentially missing out on school trips, extracurricular activities, or suffering poor school attendance. A 2025 report by the Institute for Fiscal Studies similarly identified that young people's mobility is closely tied to long-term social and economic outcomes.

This Council, being aware of the levels of child poverty in this county and the effect this has on the ability of families and young people to travel by public transport, asks the Cabinet to set up a Cabinet Advisory Group to consider a scheme to provide free or significantly reduced bus travel for children and young people up to age of 18.

Such a scheme could be funded from fines from ANPR enforcement and would enable children and young people to get to school and college settings by enabling bus companies to develop routes to school that better meet the travel needs of families and children.

This Council notes West of England Mayor Helen Goodwin has funded free travel for children up to 16 this summer.

Note: The motion, if passed, would constitute the exercise of an executive function in which case it will be referred to the Cabinet together with any advice the Council may wish to give, in accordance with Rule 13.5.1 (i) of the Council Procedure Rules in the Constitution.

18. Motion from Councillor James Plumb

Council notes the increasing pressures on Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) services across Oxfordshire, with rising demand, complex needs, and a need for stronger local support.

Previously, Oxfordshire County Council had a dedicated Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement, reflecting the importance of this area.

This role was recently removed, diluting specific leadership and focus on one of the most challenging areas of Council responsibility.

Council believes that:

1. Children and young people with SEND deserve a dedicated champion at the highest political level within the Council.
2. A single Cabinet Member with clear and focused responsibility for SEND would enhance decision-making, oversight, and transparency.
3. Reinstating this post would demonstrate a renewed commitment to improving outcomes for families who rely on these vital services.

Council therefore resolves to:

- a) Ask the Leader of the Council to reinstate the Cabinet Member for SEND Improvement as a standalone portfolio within the Cabinet.
- b) Ensure this role has clear responsibility for SEND policy, provision, and engagement with parents, carers, and stakeholders.
- c) Request that the Leader provides a written response to this motion, setting out the steps being taken to strengthen leadership and accountability within SEND services.

19. Motion from Councillor Ian Middleton

A well-functioning opposition is a vital part of our democracy. The recent elections returned the first majority controlled council at OCC for years along with 3 main opposition party groups. Labour were the largest single party, but the Conservatives alliance with some independents resulted in two groups of equal size. This led to

confusion over which group would be the 'Official Opposition'.

As this situation was not envisaged within our constitution, the Monitoring Officer advised that both groups should be considered as the official opposition with Special Responsibility Allowances (SRAs) available to both. It was also deemed that the Chairs of the 4 main overview and scrutiny committees should be split between them.

This has created a constitutional anomaly requiring urgent consideration. It's also an opportunity to consider how financial and operational support for all significant opposition groups could be provided given the changed political landscape of OCC.

We therefore request an urgent review of the constitution and allowances scheme in respect of opposition groups, to determine:

1. How a principal opposition group should be defined where groups have equal numbers.
2. If members of all opposition groups above a certain size should be entitled to SRAs from a single proportionally shared budget.
3. The possibility of providing a support officer for all opposition groups on a timesharing basis, reflecting the relative sizes of recognised groups.
4. If chairs of scrutiny committees should be available to any member of a recognised group outside of the controlling administration, based on proportionality.

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.

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.

Agenda Item 1

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 20 May 2025 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 12.15 pm

Present:

Councillor Mark Lygo – in the Chair

Councillors:

Ted Fenton (Vice-Chair)	James Fry	Kieron Mallon
Thomas Ashby	Andrew Gant	Emma Markham
Brad Baines	Emma Garnett	Gavin McLauchlan
James Barlow	Sean Gaul	Lesley McLean
Ron Batstone	Stefan Gawrysiak	Ian Middleton
Tim Bearder	Laura Gordon	Toyah Overton
Will Boucher-Giles	Andy Graham	Glynis Phillips
Chris Brant	Tom Greenaway	James Plumb
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Kate Gregory	Susanna Pressel
Mark Cherry	Jane Hanna OBE	Leigh Rawlins
Andrew Coles	Jenny Hannaby	Judy Roberts
Izzy Creed	David Henwood	James Robertshaw
Andrew Crichton	Georgina Heritage	Paul Austin Sargent
Hao Du	Ben Higgins	Geoff Saul
Imade Edosomwan	David Hingley	John Shiri
Judith Edwards	Johnny Hope-Smith	Roz Smith
Gareth Epps	Robin Jones	Ian Snowdon
Lee Evans	Liz Leffman	Peter Stevens
Neil Fawcett	Dan Levy	Bethia Thomas
Nick Field-Johnson	Dr Nathan Ley	Liam Walker
Maggie Filipova-Rivers	Diana Lugova	Tony Worgan
Rebekah Fletcher	Saj Malik	

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.

27/25 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE 2025/26 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda Item 1)

Before nominations were invited for the office of Chair of the Council, Mrs Alison Rooke, the retiring Chair, invited Members to reflect on the tragic fire at Bicester Motion which took the lives of firefighters Jennie Logan, Martyn Sadler and a member of the public, Dave Chester. Two further firefighters sustained serious injuries and remained in hospital in a stable condition.

The retiring Chair invited the Bishop of Dorchester to share thoughts and prayers. Following his address a minute's silence was observed.

The meeting was adjourned for 15 minutes to allow Members to sign books of condolences.

On the resumption, the retiring Chair thanked her husband and Consort, Brian Rooke, for his support during the year. She also thanked the Democratic Services and Facilities Management Teams, the Monitoring Officer and her Vice-Chair, Councillor Lygo. It was noted that over £9,200 had been raised for the Chair's chosen charities over the year, and the retiring Chair thanked all for their support.

The Monitoring Officer invited nominations for the office of Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Council Year. Councillor Brighthouse moved, and Councillor Leffman seconded that Councillor Mark Lygo be elected as Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Council Year. There being no other nominations and no dissent, Councillor Rooke was duly declared elected.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that Councillor Mark Lygo be elected as Chair for the 2025/26 Council Year.

(Councillor Mark Lygo in the Chair).

28/25 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE 2025/26 COUNCIL YEAR

(Agenda Item 2)

The Chair called for nominations for the office of Vice-Chair.

Councillor Walker moved and Councillor Brighthouse seconded that Councillor Ted Fenton be elected as Vice-Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Council Year. There being no other nominations, Councillor Ted Fenton was duly declared elected Vice-Chair of the Council for the 2025/26 Council Year.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that Councillor Ted Fenton be elected Vice-Chair for the 2025/26 Council Year.

29/25 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 3)

The minutes of the meeting held on 1 April 2025 were approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

30/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 4)

Apologies were received from Councillors Cotter, Kerr and Webb.

31/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 5)

There were no declarations of interest.

32/25 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 6)

Thirteen firefighters who have served Oxfordshire residents for a combined total of 260 years (20 years each) have been presented with His Majesty The King's long service and good conduct medals.

In addition, four firefighters with a combined total of 120 years' service received commemorative clasps and certificates. The awards were presented by Marjorie Glasgow BEM, His Majesty's Lord-Lieutenant of Oxfordshire,

At the Oxfordshire Care Awards, organised by the Oxfordshire Association of Care Providers, Shared Lives carers, Roger and Kym Garnett were named winners of the 'Long Service' category. This follows their recognition in our own Shared Lives awards, having committed 27 years to the programme.

Our Community Partnership Team were finalists in the 'Team' category having been recognised for the flexible nature of the support they offer.

It was noted that the Chair's events since the last meeting of Council were listed in the Schedule of Business.

33/25 RETURNING OFFICER'S REPORT

(Agenda Item 7)

The report was proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair.

RESOLVED (unanimously): to note the return of persons elected as Councillors for Oxfordshire County Council on 1 May 2025.

34/25 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 8)

The Chair called for nominations for the office of Leader of the Council.

Councillor Fawcett moved and Councillor Graham seconded that Councillor Liz Leffman be elected as Leader of the Council. There being no other nominations, Councillor Liz Leffman was duly declared elected Leader of the Council.

RESOLVED: (unanimously) that Councillor Liz Leffman be elected Leader of the Council.

Council noted the Leader's Cabinet appointments. The detailed portfolios were circulated to Members and published online alongside the Agenda.

Resources and Deputy Leader: Cllr Neil Fawcett

Future Economy and Innovation: Cllr Ben Higgins
Children and Young People: Cllr Sean Gaul
Place, Environment and Climate Action: Cllr Judy Roberts
Finance, Property and Transformation: Cllr Dan Levy
Transport Management: Cllr Andrew Gant
Adults: Cllr Tim Bearder
Public Health and Inequalities: Cllr Kate Gregory
Community Wellbeing and Safety: Cllr Jenny Hannaby

A report was before Council on clarification of 'Opposition Group' arrangements which was published in the Addenda.

The report was proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair.

Council noted the report on Opposition Arrangements and the Leaders of the Opposition:

Councillor Liz Brighthouse, Labour & Cooperative Group
Councillor Liam Walker: Oxfordshire Alliance

35/25 COMMITTEES AND REVIEW OF POLITICAL BALANCE

(Agenda Item 9)

Council considered a report required by the Local Government & Housing Act 1989 to review the political balance on its committees after an election.

The report, with amendments from political group leaders to the appointments, was proposed by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair.

The recommendations were agreed.

Council RESOLVED:

- a) **To note the review of political balance of committees to reflect the formation of the groups following the Council election on 1 May 2025.**
- b) **To appoint members to the committees of the Council as listed at Annex 1 with the following amendments.**

Councillor Gareth Epps appointed to the Thames Valley Police & Crime Panel.

**On the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee:
Councillor Lee Evans will replace Councillor Kieron Mallon**

**On the Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee:
Councillor Kieron Mallon will replace Councillor Lee Evans**

Councillor Emma Garnett appointed to the Oxfordshire County Council & Employers Joint Consultative Committee

Councillor Emma Markham appointed to the Oxfordshire County Council & Uniformed Members of the Fire Service Joint Consultative Committee.

36/25 SCHEME OF DELEGATION TO OFFICERS

(Agenda Item 10)

At its Annual Meeting, Council is required to agree the officer scheme of delegation within the Council's Constitution.

The recommendations were moved by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair. The recommendations were approved with 62 votes in favour, 2 abstentions and no votes against.

RESOLVED: to amend the Constitution as follows:

- a) **approve amendments to Part 7.1: Officers as shown in Annex 1;**
- b) **approve amendments to Part 7.2: Scheme of Delegation to Officers as shown in Annex 3.**

37/25 GENERAL DISPENSATIONS

(Agenda Item 11)

Council was asked to approve a number of general dispensations under the Localism Act 2011.

The report was moved by the Chair and seconded by the Vice-Chair. The recommendations were approved.

RESOLVED to

- a) **approve, under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011, the general dispensations, listed at paragraph 5 of this report, for all elected and co-opted voting Members of Oxfordshire County Council;**
- b) **agree that those general dispensations should remain in force for a period of four years;**
- c) **agree that the granting of individual dispensations under Section 33 of the Localism Act 2011 and the Code of Conduct remains delegated to the Monitoring Officer.**

38/25 ANNUAL REPORT OF THE AUDIT & GOVERNANCE COMMITTEE

(Agenda Item 12)

Council received the Annual Report of the Audit & Governance Committee setting out the role and summarising the work that has been undertaken both

as a Committee and through the support of the Audit Working Group in 2024/25.

The report was proposed by Councillor Ted Fenton and seconded by Councillor Roz Smith, Chair and Deputy Chair of the Committee for the 2024/25 Council Year.

Council noted the report.

39/25 COMMITTEE MEETING DATES FOR INFORMATION
(Agenda Item 13)

Council noted the meeting dates.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

MINUTES of the meeting held on Tuesday, 20 May 2025 commencing at 2.00 pm and finishing at 2.20 pm

Present:

Councillor Mark Lygo – in the Chair

Councillors:

Ted Fenton (Vice-Chair)	Andrew Gant	Emma Markham
Thomas Ashby	Emma Garnett	Gavin McLauchlan
Brad Baines	Sean Gaul	Lesley McLean
James Barlow	Laura Gordon	Ian Middleton
Ron Batstone	Andy Graham	Toyah Overton
Tim Bearder	Tom Greenaway	Glynis Phillips
Will Boucher-Giles	Kate Gregory	James Plumb
Chris Brant	Jane Hanna OBE	Leigh Rawlins
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jenny Hannaby	Judy Roberts
Mark Cherry	David Henwood	James Robertshaw
Andrew Coles	Georgina Heritage	Paul Austin Sargent
Izzy Creed	Ben Higgins	Geoff Saul
Andrew Crichton	David Hingley	John Shiri
Hao Du	Johnny Hope-Smith	Roz Smith
Imade Edosomwan	Robin Jones	Ian Snowdon
Judith Edwards	Liz Leffman	Peter Stevens
Gareth Epps	Dan Levy	Bethia Thomas
Lee Evans	Dr Nathan Ley	Liam Walker
Neil Fawcett	Diana Lugova	Tony Worgan
Rebekah Fletcher	Saj Malik	
James Fry	Kieron Mallon	

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.

40/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 1)

Apologies were received from Councillors Cotter, Filipova-Rivers, Gawrysiak, Kerr, Pressel and Webb.

41/25 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 2)

There were no declarations of interest.

42/25 APPOINTMENT OF HONORARY ALDERMAN

(Agenda Item 3)

The Council had before it a report, setting out Section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 which allowed Councils` to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on former Councillors who had, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent service to the Council as past members of the Council.

Council noted a correction to the report on Honorary Aldermen. Bob Johnston was first elected in 1993 and returned successfully three times until losing out in 2009. He was re-elected in 2013 and held the seat until this year – a total of 28 years as councillor. Michael Waine was first elected 2005 and so was a councillor for 20 years.

On the recommendation of the Group Leaders, Council was invited to confer the title of Honorary Alderman in recognition of their significant contribution to the Council in particular, and for their public service to Mr Bob Johnston and Mr Michael Waine.

The Group Leaders and others paid warm tribute to Michael Waine and his years of service on the Council.

As Bob Johnston was unable to be present for this meeting, it was agreed to defer tributes to the July Council meeting.

RESOLVED: to confer the title of Honorary Alderman, under section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, in recognition of their significant contribution to the Council in particular and public service in general to: Mr Bob Johnston and Mr Michael Waine.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

COUNCIL – 8 July 2025

Appointments to Committees

Report by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Council is RECOMMENDED to

note the appointments listed in paragraph 7 of this report to

- the Corporate Parenting Panel
- Oxfordshire County Council and Employees Joint Consultative Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council and Teachers Joint Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council Joint Consultative Committee for Uniformed Members of the Fire Service

Executive Summary

2. Nominations were received from the political group leaders shortly after the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2025 and given effect by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer on 28 May 2025 under a delegation in the Scheme of Delegation to Officers.

Appointments by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

3. The Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer has the delegation under Sections 16(1) and Section 16(2) of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989, to give effect to the wishes of the political groups as regards membership of overview and scrutiny committees and committees of the Council (Constitution Part 7.2 Scheme of Delegation to Officers, paragraph 6.4 (l)).
4. The four bodies on which vacancies remained following the Annual Council meeting do not form part of the calculation of political balance.
5. Shortly after the Annual Council meeting on 20 May 2025 nominations were received from the political group leaders to fill vacant positions on
- the Corporate Parenting Panel

- Oxfordshire County Council and Employees Joint Consultative Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council and Teachers Joint Committee
- Oxfordshire County Council Joint Consultative Committee for Uniformed Members of the Fire Service

6. As each of the four bodies was scheduled to meet, or have an agenda published, before the next Council meeting on 8 July 2025, the Director agreed on 28 May 2025 to approve the appointments under her delegation and report the appointments to Council at the July meeting.

7. The appointments result in the following full membership of the bodies:

	Liberal Democrat	Oxfordshire Alliance	Labour & Cooperative	Green
Corporate Parenting Panel (9)	5	2	2	
	Judy Roberts	James Plumb	Izzy Creed	
	Jane Hanna	James Robertshaw	Liz Brighthouse	
	Maggie Filipova-Rivers			
	Toyah Overton			
	Ben Higgins			
Oxfordshire County Council & Employees Joint Consultative Committee (7)	4	1	1	1
	Roz Smith	Thomas Ashby	Glynis Phillips	Emma Garnett
	Neil Fawcett			
	Laura Gordon			
	Tony Worgan			
Oxfordshire County Council & Teachers Joint Committee (5)	3	1	1	
	Maggie Filipova-Rivers	David Henwood	Liz Brighthouse	
	Sean Gaul			

	Andy Graham			
Oxfordshire County Council Joint Consultative Committee for Uniformed Members of the Fire Service (7)	4	1	1	1
	Jenny Hannaby	Ted Fenton	Mark Lygo	Emma Markham
	Gareth Epps			
	Bethia Thomas			
	David Hingley			

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications of the above.

Comments checked by:

Drew Hodgson
Strategic Finance Business Partner
Drew.Hodgson@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

9. The report is notifying Council of appointments made under a delegation to the Director of Law and Governance Monitoring Officer under the Constitution Part 7.2 Scheme of Delegation to Officers, paragraph 6.4 (l). There are no legal implications.

Comments checked by: Kim Sawyer, Interim Head of Legal and Governance,
Kim.Sawyer@Oxfordshire.gov.uk

ANITA BRADLEY
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Contact Officer: Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Democratic Services Manager,
colm.ocaomhanaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

June 2025

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Divisions- N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL – 8 July 2025

REPORT OF THE CABINET

Cabinet Member: Leader

1. Initial Response to Government: Statutory invitation for Local Government Reorganisation and Devolution

(Cabinet, 20 March 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report on interim proposals for Local Government reorganisation in response to a statutory invitation by the Government following publication of the Devolution White Paper on 16 December 2024. Since the receipt of the statutory invitation, all Councils across Oxfordshire had been working together on initial options accompanied by a single interim plan. The three proposals presented for restructuring: a single unitary authority, two unitary authorities including parts of West Berkshire, and three units which would include Greater Oxford and parts of Berkshire would be submitted to the Government. The County Council's preferred option was the single unitary authority for Oxfordshire.

Cabinet approved the recommendations to submit to Government the interim plan and each option for local government reorganisation as set out in the report and to support the optimal model for re-organisation – a single county unitary for Oxfordshire. Members also agreed that, as the constituent member of any future Mayoral County Combined Authority, the Cabinet's preferred geography for a Mayoral Strategic Authority was Berkshire, Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire.

Cabinet Member: Resources and Deputy Leader

2. HR & Cultural Change - Quarterly Employee Data Report - Quarter 4 2024-25

(Cabinet, 17 June 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report which provided an overview of the progress towards delivering the "Our People and Culture Strategy" (as measured by the achievement of its key performance indicators) and summarised the main employee-related trends for the 4th quarter of 2024/25

Members noted the report and welcomed the positive trends illustrated in the statistics.

Cabinet Member: Children and Young People

3. Home to School Transport & Post 16 Travel Policy 2025-26

(Cabinet, 17 June 2025)

The Council's existing Home to School Transport Policies were last consulted upon in 2014 (Compulsory School Age) and 2018 (Post 16). Department for Education Guidance was last updated in 2019 for Post 16 Travel and in 2023 and 2024 for Compulsory School Age.

Local authorities were required to keep their school travel policy under regular review to ensure it continued to meet local needs and comply with statutory requirements. Due to the significant time that had passed since the previous consultations, a review of the policies was undertaken in 2024. The purpose of the review was to ensure alignment with the Council's statutory obligations and identify existing areas of discretionary provision.

Cabinet approved the recommendations following analysis of the public consultation feedback in relation to the Home to School Travel and Transport Policy 2025/26 onwards for Reception to Year 11. Members also agreed to the adoption of the proposed Post 16 Transport Policy Statement Academic Year 2026/27, which reflected the consultation analysis recommendations to not introduce a contribution charge for those eligible for support under the policy.

Cabinet Member: Place, Environment and Climate Action

4. Response to Council Motion on Part-Night Lighting by Councillor Brighthouse

(Cabinet, 25 March 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report which proposed a response to the motion on part-night lighting that was passed at Council on 10 December 2024. The revised proposals for part-night lighting would be subject to consultation with residents and stakeholders.

Members welcomed the proposed response and emphasised the importance of knowledge about nighttime behaviour patterns, particularly those of the younger population when considering any changes to street lighting.

Cabinet approved the recommendations including proposals for a full and thorough consultation and a community led approach to any part-night lighting proposal, through an application made by the town/parish council (if there is one) and the local county councillor, which, following this request, would include an area specific public consultation.

Cabinet Member: Finance, Property and Transformation

5. Treasury Management Q3 Performance Report 2024/25

(Cabinet, 25 March 2025)

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) 'Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021' requires that the committee to which some treasury management responsibilities are delegated, will receive regular monitoring reports on treasury management activities and risks. Cabinet received a report which set out the position at 31 December 2024.

Cabinet noted the report which confirmed that the Council operated within its prudential indicators and included the repayment of loans during the third quarter, and the new debt of £500,000 through a community municipal investment to finance decarbonisation initiatives.

6. Business Management and Monitoring Report - January 2025

(25 March 2025)

Cabinet considered a report presenting the January 2025 performance, risk, and finance position for the council. The business management reports were part of a suite of performance, risk and budget documents which set out the council's ambitions, priorities, and financial performance. The report explained the background to the Council's current financial position. The projected underspend of £10.5 million would be considered by the Cabinet at the June 2025 meeting.

There were ongoing significant issues with the Direct Schools Grant funding for high needs. These had been highlighted to the government, but no sustainable solution had been provided as yet.

Cabinet noted the report and approved a number of recommended financial adjustments.

7. Capital Programme and Monitoring Report - January 2025

(Cabinet, 25 March 2025)

Cabinet had before it the fourth capital programme update and monitoring report for 2024/25 which set out the monitoring position based on activity to the end of January 2025. The report also updated the Capital Programme approved by Council in February 2025 taking into account additional funding and new schemes. The updated programme also incorporated changes agreed through the Capital Programme Approval Reports to Cabinet during the year as well as new funding.

Cabinet noted the report and approved the following changes to the Capital Programme:-

- a) a budget increase for the Speedwell House Redevelopment programme, to be funded from corporate resources. (see paragraph 63 - 65)
- b) the inclusion of £2.500m funding into the Capital Programme to fund a contribution to the Cowley Branch Line. The expectation is that as far as possible, this will be funded by S106 developer contributions. Any funding gap will be met through alternative funding sources. (see paragraph 66 - 70)

8. Capital Programme Approvals - April 2025

(Cabinet, 22 April 2025)

Cabinet had before it which set out change requests requiring Cabinet approval that will be incorporated into the agreed Capital programme and included in the next update to programme in June 2025

Cabinet approved the following changes to the programme:-

- a) the addition of a new phase of energy saving measures into the capital programme, at a total cost of £10.360m. The two-year programme will run from 2025-2027 and is to be funded by £10.000m from corporate resources, as approved by Council in February 2025, with the remaining £0.360m to be funded by a successful bid to Phase 4 of the Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme (PSDS4).
- b) the inclusion of phase 2 and 3 of Fire Compartmentation Remedial works into the capital programme, at a cost of £3.700m. The programme of work is to be funded from £2.000m corporate resources agreed by Council in February 2024 and a further £1.700m agreed by Council in February 2025.

9. Business Management & Monitoring Report - Annual Report, Provisional Revenue Outturn 2024/25

(Cabinet, 17 June 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report which presented the Council's year-end position for 2024/25 on performance, risk, and finance.

Members highlighted a number of achievements by the Council during the year:-

- a) Oxfordshire was again the top performing waste disposal authority in the Country for the 11th year running. Residents recycled, reused, or composted nearly 58% of household waste.
- b) To make roads safer and to avoid any deaths or serious injuries on our roads, the Council had awarded £106,530 in grants to organisations to maintain Community transport services.

- c) The Council was first in the country to achieve authority of sanctuary status.
- d) Members also noted positive steps forward in driving digital and information support sessions in libraries. A number of libraries had been refurbished during the year.
- e) The Council had become a Marmot place. These are areas that are actively working to reduce health inequalities and improve overall well-being by addressing the social determinants of health.
- f) The longest waiting time for adult social care assessment was now 42 days, which is a reduction of 80% over the last four years. In children's services, the quality of education, healthcare plans is improving. 44% were rated good or outstanding in November 2024 compared with 21% in July 2023.

Cabinet also welcomed the Council's positive financial position detailed in the report. This puts the authority in a strong financial position as it heads into 2026 and beyond.

Cabinet noted the report and approved a number of proposals relating to reserves and the use of general balances.

10. Capital Outturn Report 2024-25

(Cabinet, 17 June 2025)

The ten-year Capital Programme sets out the agreed capital investment to deliver the priorities identified in the council's Capital and Investment Strategy. Cabinet received a report which provided an update on the performance against the programme shown in the latest monitoring report for 2024/25 and also compared back to the capital programme agreed by Council in February 2024. Figures shown reflected those to be included in the Council's Statement of Accounts for 2024/25.

11. Capital Programme Approvals - June 2025

(Cabinet, 17 June 2025)

The Capital Programme was approved by Council in February 2025 and will be updated during the year through the capital programme and monitoring reports. Cabinet had before it a report setting out change requests requiring Cabinet approval that will be incorporated into the agreed programme and included in the next update to the Capital Programme in July 2025.

Members agreed the recommendations to:-

- a) approve the inclusion of a programme of work into the capital programme with an indicative budget of £5.906m to be funded from the Traffic Congestion Improvement Fund (TCIF), agreed through Council in February 2024.

- b) note the proposed schemes to be delivered under the TCIF programme of work.
- c) approve a budget increase of £1.800m for the Access to Witney Scheme from £25.025m to £26.825m to be funded by incorporating £1.800m from the Traffic Congestion Improvement Fund.
- d) approve the inclusion of the Benson Lane Bus Service Improvement Plan (BSIP) into the capital programme, with an indicative budget of £1.232m, to be funded by a combination of developer contributions, Transport Provision funding, BSIP programme funds and the Traffic Congestion Improvement Fund.

Cabinet Member: Public Health and Inequalities

12. Cost of Living programme for 2025/26

(Cabinet, 22 April 2025)

Cabinet had before it a report setting out the intended approach to support those residents who were most negatively impacted by cost-of-living pressures following the government's announcement of an extension of the Household Support Fund from 1 April 2025 to 31 March 2026.

The report also provided the latest position on the impact of cost-of-living pressures and set out highlights from the 2024/25 funding programme. The main elements of the programme including holiday free school meal support, resident support scheme (crisis payments and local district level funding), and advice services.

Cabinet approved the support package for 2025/26 and the repurposing £85,000 of funding held in the Emergency Welfare Fund reserve to support the Community Wealth Building programme.

Cabinet Member: Transport Management

13. Citizens' Assembly Update

(Cabinet, 25 March 2025)

Cabinet considered a report which provided an update on the first ever citizens' assembly organised by Oxfordshire County Council. The report described the process followed, presented the key recommendations from the assembly and set out how the Council intended to respond to them using a structured framework.

The assembly's purpose was to make recommendations on how the vision and targets set out in the council's local transport and connectivity plan (LTCP) could be achieved in ways that best met the needs and preferences of the people of Oxfordshire and other stakeholders. Part of the scope of the assembly was to consider congestion in central Oxfordshire and the core schemes in the central Oxfordshire travel plan.

Cabinet approved the recommendations to commit to considering and responding to the key recommendations of the travel and transport citizens' assembly and requested that the Place and Overview Scrutiny Committee consider the council's response to the assembly recommendations, prior to consideration by Cabinet in July 2025.

14. Traffic Filter Trial Delay - Mitigation Proposals (17 June 2025)

Network Rail's ongoing closure of Botley Road at Oxford station meant that Cabinet's November 2022 decision to introduce six trial traffic filters in Oxford could not be implemented until at least August 2026.

Officers had reviewed a range of potential options to mitigate this situation, and the recommended options to pursue (subject to consultation and development) had been identified. Cabinet received a report outlining the background, the need for intervention, and the options considered.

Members were addressed by a number of members of the public and councillors on the proposals.

Cabinet approved the recommendations to authorise officers to carry out a public consultation on a proposal to temporarily implement a congestion charging scheme using the systems and infrastructure developed for the traffic filter trial, to mitigate the impact of the delay of the traffic filter trial while Botley Road remains closed. Members also requested officers to develop an 'income spending strategy' which will focus the net surplus income on reducing the costs of bus travel, including potential park and ride incentives, in accordance with relevant legislation.

15. Scrutiny Reports

(Cabinet: 25 March, 22 April and 17 June 2025)

Cabinet received the following Scrutiny Reports: -

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

Local Area Partnership SEND Update (25 March 2025)

Report of the Virtual School (17 June 2025)

Update of Children's Homes (17 June 2025)

Home to School Transport Policy (17 June 2025)

b) Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee reports on:-

Network Coordination of Road and Street works and Lane Rental for
Oxfordshire (25 March 2025)
Report of the Transport Working Group (17 June 2025)
s.106 Improvement Project (17 June 2025)
Rail Strategy (17 June 2025)

c) People Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report on:-

Co-production in Adult Social Care (22 April 2025)

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

Local Enterprise Partnership Integration (17 June 2025)
Business Management and Monitoring Report (17 June 2025)

LIZ LEFFMAN

Leader of the Council

July 2025

Divisions Affected – All

COUNCIL 8 JULY 2025

Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) Annual Report 2024/25

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. Council is **RECOMMENDED** to: -

Receive and **NOTE** the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (JHOSC) Annual Report set out in Annex 1.

Executive Summary

2. The Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee is under a constitutional duty to prepare an annual report. That report is set out in Annex 1 and documents the breadth and depth of the Committee's work over the 2024/25 municipal year.
3. The annual report annexed to this cover report explains some of the key accomplishments and highlights of the Committee's activities over the past municipal year including:

Supporting Oxfordshire Place in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board Restructure: The Committee requested a call-in from the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in regards to the Integrated Care Board's proposed restructure. Whilst the Secretary of State did not invoke the call-in power, they urged the Council and the ICB to continue to work together to find a resolution. The outcome was that the ICB made alterations to its initial proposals in response to the JHOSC's feedback and recommendations.

Securing additional primary care estate: As a result of its ongoing scrutiny of primary care services and its recommendations for primary care estate development in response to increased demand, the Committee was pleased to hear that planning permission was granted for primary care estate development on the Didcot Great Western Park.

Promoting healthy weight policies in Oxford and Cherwell: As part of efforts to promote Healthy Weight throughout the County, the

Committee wrote to the Chief executives of Oxford City and Cherwell District Councils. The JHOSC urged both authorities to implement policies that promote healthier advertising and that restrict the opening of hot food takeaway outlets besides schools in areas with the highest levels of childhood obesity.

Securing further resource for epilepsy services: The Committee conducted a deep-dive into the current state of Oxfordshire's epilepsy services, and recommended that further resourcing for epilepsy services is sought by Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and NHS England South-East Region. This recommendation was accepted, with system partners committing to working with national bodies to achieve this.

Securing further CIL funds for redeveloping Wantage Community Hospital: The Committee's substantial change working group urged for and managed to secure additional Community Infrastructure Levy funding from the Vale District Council, to support the progress of the project to redevelop Wantage Community Hospital.

Background

4. Under the Health and Social Care Act 2012, Regulation 28(1) of the Local Authority (Public Health, Health and Wellbeing Boards and Health Scrutiny) Regulations 2013 the Council has a duty to "review and scrutinise any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of the health services in its area".
5. As part of this overarching duty the JHOSC has a duty, enshrined in the Council's Constitution, to report on its activity over the preceding year. The Committee complies with it by producing an annual report on its activity over the preceding year.
6. The Constitution specifies in Part 6.1B s 23 that this report is to be produced each year.

Corporate Priorities

7. Improving health and wellbeing of residents and reducing health inequalities are stated ambitions within the Council's Strategic Plan. This annual report indicates the Committee's scrutiny of the extent to which progress is being made by the Council and its NHS partners in achieving this.

Financial Implications

8. There are no financial implications arising directly from this report and it is expected that any additional costs relating to co-optees can be met within existing budgets.

Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance

Legal Implications

9. Part 6.1B, s. 23 of the Council's constitution states that:

The Committee shall produce in April each year a report for the Appointing Authorities on its activities during the preceding year. That report shall also be published to health bodies and the public.

Kim Sawyer, Interim Head of Legal & Governance.

Staff Implications

10. None arising from this report.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

11. None arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

12. None arising from this report.

Consultations:

13. None arising from this report.

Anita Bradley

Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: 1. JHOSC Annual Report 2024/2025

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

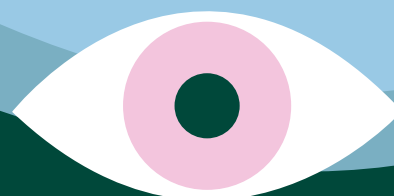
Contact Officer: Dr Omid Nouri, Health Scrutiny Officer
omid.nouri@oxfordshire.gov.uk

July 2025

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July 2025

Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC)

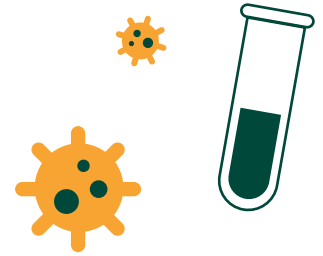


Annual Report

2024/25



1 Chair's introduction



This annual report follows a year marked by unprecedented and growing challenges for health services, including increasing health demands and pressures in most areas, particularly where there are shortages of resources. These are national issues that the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) has examined locally. The quality of care that patients have been receiving has been impacted by long wait times as well as disruptions. In its previous Annual Report, the JHOSC highlighted the issue of workforce shortages, and how pressures as a result of these shortages had significantly worsened since then. One year on, workforce shortages continue to affect healthcare services, particularly those provided by Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust (OUH) and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust (OH).

In the context of rising pressures on the health service, which are both national and regional in scope, the JHOSC has intensified its scrutiny of healthcare services in Oxfordshire with a specific focus on some of these challenges. Nonetheless, in doing so, the Committee continues to operate as a “critical friend” to those with responsibility for providing health services to local residents. As a Committee with both County and District Council representation, the Committee benefits

from significant county and neighbourhood level expertise and insights into some of the positive and challenging aspects of health services for Oxfordshire’s population groups, be they urban or rural residents. In line with the health and social care landscape in Oxfordshire, the JHOSC has closely coordinated with and kept a spotlight on the commissioning and provision of health services by the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB), Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust, and the recently developed Oxfordshire Place-Based Partnership.

The Committee also continues to contribute to scrutiny at the level of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West (BOB) geography, with the County Council members of the JHOSC participating in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee (BOB JHOSC). The cross-county JHOSC continues to engage in scrutiny of the ICB’s efforts to improve access to primary care and to explore further avenues to digitise health services against a backdrop of increased demand for services and technological advancements. The importance of continuing to participate in BOB-level scrutiny is greater at a time when government has announced plans to abolish NHS England, cut ICB running costs by 50 percent, and for ICB’s to potentially lose their health-provider oversight roles. This inevitably raises questions and concerns as to the impacts this could have on Place-level health and care services, and on the extensive and productive partnership working and collaboration that has been achieved between Oxfordshire County Council and its NHS partners.



Notwithstanding some of the key challenges in healthcare, the JHOSC has worked to retain and support strong relations with key stakeholders and organisations within the Oxfordshire system. The Committee seeks to support continued system collaborative work, as this would have a knock-on effect on the quality of services for residents throughout the county. Democratic oversight of health services is a crucial aspect of ensuring that healthcare systems function effectively, transparently, and equitably. It involves the active participation and scrutiny of health services by elected representatives, and the general public. The JHOSC has therefore worked to ensure that this oversight is essential for maintaining public trust, promoting accountability, and ensuring that health services meet the needs of Oxfordshire residents. Much of the health scrutiny work of the Committee had been made possible through the extensive engagements with key stakeholders, individuals, and organisations in the Oxfordshire health and care landscape (including NHS

representatives and Oxfordshire County Council Cabinet Members and Senior Officers) outlined below:

NHS

Susannah Butt (Transformation Director-Community Health Services, Dentistry and Primary Care, Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust)

Rachel Corser (Chief Nursing Officer, Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board)

Julie Dandridge (Deputy Director, Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board)

Olivia Clymer (Director of Strategy and Partnerships, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust)

Daniel Leveson (former Oxfordshire Place Director, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board)

Matthew Tait (Chief Delivery Officer, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board)

Lily OConnor (Urgent and Emergency Care Director for Oxfordshire)

Neil Flint (Associate Director of Planned Care, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West ICB)

Oxfordshire County Council

Ansaf Azhar (Director of Public Health, Oxfordshire County Council)

Stephen Chandler (Executive Director for People, Oxfordshire County Council)

Karen Fuller (Director of Adult Social Care, Oxfordshire County Council)

Cllr Nathan Ley (Cabinet Member for Public Health)

Cllr John Howson (Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Young People's Services)

I also wish to express thanks to the following members of the Committee for the previous year, all of whom had provided significant contributions and efforts toward the JHOSC's scrutiny functions and responsibilities:

District Cllr Katharine Keats Rohan
(Vice-Chair 2024-2025)

District Cllr Elizabeth Poskitt
(Vice-Chair 2023-2024)

Cllr Jenny Hannaby

Cllr Nick Leverton

Cllr Nigel Champken-Woods

Cllr Freddie Van Mierlo

Cllr Michael OConnor

Cllr Mark Lygo

Cllr Yvonne Constance

District Cllr Dorothy Walker

District Cllr Paul Barrow

City Cllr Susanna Pressel

Barbara Shaw

Sylvia Buckingham

The Committee issued a total of 53 recommendations in the previous council year of 2024/2025. Of these, I would draw particular attention to a few as illustrating the Committee's ongoing impact. These recommendations, the majority of which were accepted and implemented, revolved around key themes relating to medicine shortages, NHS workforce recruitment and retention, cancer services wait times and treatments, healthy weight promotion, and the support for patients discharged from hospital. One prime example was that as per the Committee's recommendation to the ICB to retain the urgent and emergency care director post in the context

“The Committee issued a total of 53 recommendations in the previous council year of 2024/2025, illustrating its ongoing impact on key themes such as medicine shortages, NHS workforce recruitment and retention, cancer services wait times and treatments, healthy weight promotion, and support for patients discharged from hospital.”

of the recent ICB proposed restructure, the decision was made to retain this post given the important role the director contributed to urgent and emergency care coordination and services jointly administered by the NHS and the County Council. Another example was the commitment by Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust and NHSE South-East Region to follow the JHOSC recommendation to seek further funding and resource for epilepsy services in light of increased demand for these services and the shortages of epilepsy staff that Oxfordshire had relative to other areas around the Country with similar levels of demand. Additionally, in the context of its scrutiny of the development of Integrated Neighbourhood Teams, the Committee's recommendation to



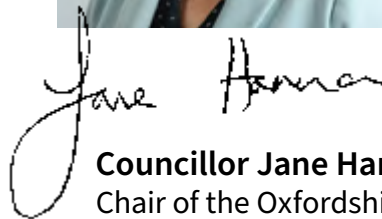
system partners to investigate health needs and population patterns for each locality and to allocate resources for these Teams accordingly was also accepted. System partners committed to working with Public Health, local councils and the information team in the Oxford University Hospitals to create a data pack for each Integrated Neighbourhood Team.

In line with its strong emphasis on coproduction, the Committee's substantial change working group remains closely involved in ongoing scrutiny of the Project Delivery Plan to expand hospital-like services at Wantage Community Hospital. This marks a continuation of the commitments by the Committee since January 2024 to monitor the delivery of the promises made by the NHS to the JHOSC, and the Committee's recommendations for Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funds to be utilised to expand clinical services for Wantage in light of the closure of the inpatient beds since 2016.

I believe the Committee operates in a collaborative spirit, and possesses a solid understanding of the landscape and factors impacting health and care services for Oxfordshire residents. I wish to thank District Cllr Katharine Keats-Rohan for her contributions as vice-chair in the past year. The Committee is also fortunate to have Sylvia Buckingham join its membership as a co-optee. Sylvia brings a wealth of knowledge, expertise, and experience to the Committee's work.

I also wish to thank Healthwatch Oxfordshire for their extensive contributions to the Committee's work and insights into health and care services from the place-based perspective of service users on the ground. The JHOSC is again also grateful to members of the public that had invested efforts in writing to as well as speaking to the Committee.

Special thanks also goes to Dr Omid Nouri, the Health Scrutiny Officer, whose dedicated efforts toward supporting the Committee had proven exceptional. The Council's increased investment into the scrutiny function has proven to increase the support for Health Scrutiny as well as the value and impact it provides.



Councillor Jane Hanna OBE

Chair of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024/2025

2 About the committee

The Oxfordshire Joint Health and Overview Scrutiny Committee (JHOSC) is a Committee within Oxfordshire County Council which focuses on health scrutiny. As a joint Committee, it consists of 7 members from the County Council, five (one each from the Districts and City).

Additionally, the membership also includes three co-optees (one of which is vacant at the point of writing this report) who are not councillors but have expertise in health-related areas. Work to recruit a third co-optee is in progress, with the aim of initiating a recruitment exercise immediately following the County Council elections in May 2025.

The JHOSC does not make decisions or amend policies directly. Instead, it scrutinises health services across Oxfordshire and can call individuals or organisations involved in health service commissioning or delivery to appear before it. The Committee leverages the diverse expertise of its members to provide oversight and issue recommendations (to Oxfordshire

County Council's Cabinet, senior officers and NHS commissioners/providers) to improve health services and in ways that add value to such services. These recommendations adhere to the SMART (Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Realistic, Timely) criteria, and in line with statutory requirements, recipients are required to respond to these in writing within 28 days.





The JHOSC also uses its influence to highlight where national constraints limit local improvements and often seeks support from the national government to address these issues. Whilst HOSCs have lost the power to formally refer matters to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care since January 2024, this does not prevent Health Scrutiny Committees from informally writing to the Secretary of State or from requesting the Department of Health and Social Care (DHSC) to call-in any decision by commissioners or providers to amend services in ways that

could be perceived as a substantial change by the Committee. In fact, as outlined in further detail below in this report, the Committee issued a call-in request to the Secretary of State in relation to the ICB's initially proposed restructure, which the JHOSC and other key Oxfordshire stakeholders were concerned by as a result of the potentially negative impacts on the commissioning and delivery of health and care services at the level of place.



3 Summary of activity

HOSC activity in brief



The Committee convened six Public Meetings in the previous municipal year 2024/2025. Over the course of these meetings it had scrutinised 18 substantive items this municipal year. Some of the key items of scrutiny involved:

- ▶ **Winter Planning.**
- ▶ **Health and Wellbeing Strategy outcomes framework.**
- ▶ **BOB Integrated Care Board Restructure.**
- ▶ **Support for People Leaving Hospital.**
- ▶ **Maternity Services.**
- ▶ **Medicine Shortages.**
- ▶ **Epilepsy Services.**
- ▶ **Cancer Services.**
- ▶ **Musculoskeletal Services.**
- ▶ **Audiology Services**
- ▶ **Director of Public Health Annual Report.**
- ▶ **Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust People Plan.**



October 2023 Care Quality Commission (CQC) Inspection and the publication of a birth dossier produced by Keep the Horton General (KTHG).

- ▶ **Patient safety from Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This was to provide further detail on the steps taken by the Trust to address the CQC's previously flagged concerns regarding the handling of patient safety.**
- ▶ **The Committee also held an online meeting with Oxfordshire's MPs and the Council's Senior Leadership Team for the purposes of briefing local MPs on the likely impacts of the initially proposed changes to the ICB's operating model.**

Within the past civic year, the Committee has issued 66 formal recommendations to the NHS as well as Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet. Of these 66 recommendations, 32 were accepted, 22 were partially accepted, and 3 rejected. At the time of writing this report, the JHOSC is awaiting responses to 9 recommendations, which it should receive imminently.

The Committee had also received briefings from the NHS on a number of areas including:

- ▶ **Changes to the BOB Integrated Care Board's operating model.**
- ▶ **Measures taken to improve maternity services in light of the findings of both an**

The committee's substantial change working group had also met three times within the last civic year to discuss the recommendations it was issuing to the wider JHOSC as to the future of Wantage Community Hospital. This working group also held three online check-in briefings with representatives from the ICB and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust for the purposes of receiving updates on the NHS's public engagement exercise around the future of Wantage Community Hospital.

Key accomplishments

The JHOSC had dedicated significant time and work to scrutinising various areas that involved crucial developments and decisions impacting the health and wellbeing of Oxfordshire's residents. Over the past municipal year (as with the year prior to that), the Committee embraced a comprehensive and holistic approach to Health and Wellbeing, aligning with both national and local initiatives to further integrate health and care services for residents and to emphasise a broader model of health and wellbeing.

The success of the JHOSC can be measured by the positive outcomes of its work in contributing to developments that benefit the Health and Wellbeing of Oxfordshire's residents. The following constitute the JHOSC's most significant contributions.

i. Safeguarding Oxfordshire Place in the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board restructure:

The Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board commenced a consultation in July 2024 on a new and revised operating model. The ICB perceived the consultation as relating to a staff restructuring and therefore limited its engagement with key partners. However, it remained clear from the consultation document that was shared with key stakeholders (including the JHOSC) that the proposed restructure constituted a significant change to the way that NHS services would be commissioned (and potentially delivered) in Oxfordshire. The proposed changes primarily related to key areas such as prevention and early intervention, urgent care services, infection control resources, and the place convenor (Director of Place for Oxfordshire) role. The proposed changes involved a centralisation of functions and activities that were previously

managed effectively at place level, and the ICB had initially not provided appropriate reasonings and justifications as to why those changes were necessary, nor that they would result in improved outcomes for Oxfordshire residents.

The Committee was concerned given that a significant aspect of these changes revolved around the ICB role of Director of Place for Oxfordshire, which up until the summer of 2024 was a role that was pivotal in coordinating place-based collaborative work between system partners. This role was to be removed, and a new role of Director of Places and Communities to be created by the ICB, with a responsibility for Directing all three places of Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West.

The Committee's view was that the ICB had not effectively and adequately reached out to Oxfordshire County Council (as well as other key stakeholders/member organisations of the Oxfordshire Place-Based Partnership) prior to formally presenting and announcing these proposals to key stakeholders. The ICB was of the view that the proposed operating model did not constitute a substantial change, and that there was therefore no statutory obligation to engage in a formal public consultation. However, the JHOSC was of the view that the proposed operating model did indeed constitute a substantial change. The Committee understood that the ICB was instructed to make reductions to staffing costs. However, it believed that the proposals being made by the ICB reflected more than simple staffing changes or a minor amendment of the ICB's management structure. Services could be negatively and directly impacted in a manner that would make the proposed operating model a substantial change.

Upon hearing of the ICB's proposed changes to its operating model, a strong consideration was whether the Committee should submit a call-in request to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care in relation to the ICB restructure. The timing of the ICB's consultation period was problematic for the JHOSC from a scrutiny standpoint for two key reasons:

1. The timescales allocated to the consultation were too short for a proposal of great importance to Oxfordshire.
2. The consultation initiated in July, which was a period when the JHOSC, like other public meetings of the Council, did not have a planned meeting. This necessitated urgent action from the Committee.

Upon hearing of these proposals, the Committee convened an extraordinary meeting on 2 August 2024. The meeting had in attendance representatives from most of Oxfordshire's key stakeholder organisations and individuals, including MPs. During the meeting, there was a unanimous agreement by the Committee as well as those present that the ICB's proposed operating model would not be in the interests of Oxfordshire's residents. However, to allow further discussions between the ICB and key stakeholders, the decision to request a call-in by the Secretary of State was deferred. This request was made at a subsequent meeting in September 2024. The outcome of this was the Department of Health and Social Care declined to invoke ministerial powers to call-in the decision, although the government urged the Council and the ICB to continue to work together and to negotiate a resolution to the dispute over the ICB's changes to its operating model.

Nonetheless, the value of the JHOSC's involvement in this matter is manifested in the fact that notwithstanding the Department of Health's reluctance to utilise the call-in process, the work of the Committee had contributed toward the ICB's decision to revise their original proposed restructure in four ways:

1. Contrary to the original proposition to centralise budgets, a number of delegated budgets would be retained at place level.
2. The ICB had decided to retain the post of Urgent and Emergency Director for Oxfordshire.
3. The ICB expressed that although they would no longer host the role of Place Director for Oxfordshire, that they would be supportive of any initiatives taken by Oxfordshire County Council and its partners to establish an Oxfordshire Place convenor role.
4. The ICB had also expressed a commitment to dedicate a member of their executive team to be an executive sponsor for Oxfordshire Place.

The Committee is involved in ongoing scrutiny of the developments taking place around the operating model and the ongoing negotiations taking place between the County Council and the ICB. The importance of ongoing scrutiny of these developments is even more crucial in light of central government's recent announcement to cut ICB running costs by 50 percent. The JHOSC seeks to remain at the forefront of ensuring that the importance and centrality of place is not diminished in the context of such revisions to ICB budgets and structures.



ii. Continuing to secure the future of Wantage Community Hospital

Since the ‘temporary’ closure of the inpatient beds at Wantage Community Hospital in 2016, the Committee has remained engaged in ongoing scrutiny of the future of Wantage Community Hospital. A proposal to develop a solution with Wantage Town Council and local stakeholders came to the JHOSC in June 2023, and the Committee accepted the proposal to support and participate in a process of coproduction to determine the future of the services to be delivered on the ground floor of the hospital. Intensive work followed with stakeholder and public engagement involving coproduction with Wantage Town Council health representatives and the regular scrutiny undertaken by the JHOSC’s substantial change working group. The outcome of this was to hold a JHOSC public meeting in January 2024, where it was agreed that the Committee would not refer the closure of the community hospital beds to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, and where the following specific recommendations were issued to Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and the ICB:

1. That there is no undue delay in securing the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) funding available in full for the purposes of providing the additional proposed clinical services on the ground floor of Wantage Community Hospital.
2. That the Project Delivery Plan for the future of the hospital’s ground floor services is delivered on schedule as much as possible, and that there is ongoing scrutiny over the process of delivering the plan and its outcomes for the local population.



During the previous municipal year 2024/2025, the Committee continued to scrutinise the delivery of the NHS’ proposed project delivery plan for the future of hospital-like services through two key avenues:

- The Wantage Community Hospital Governance and Oversight Group, which comprises key representatives of system organisations responsible for contributing to the implementation of the project delivery plan for the future of services to be delivered at the hospital. This group met regularly in the previous year, and the JHOSC Chair and Health Scrutiny Officer also sit on this group.
- The HOSC substantial change working group (comprising Cllr Hanna, District Cllr Paul Barrow, and former Councillors Nigel Champken-Woods and Damian Haywood), held two meetings with key representatives from Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust and the ICB on 22 October 2024, and on 16 December 2024.

Given that CIL funds would need to be accessed for the purposes of providing the clinical services that the NHS had committed to, the JHOSC’s substantial change working group and the wider Committee had, during the previous municipal year, closely campaigned and monitored the process of ringfencing the available £600,000 CIL funds from the Vale of White Horse District Council for the purposes of financing the delivery of the hospital’s project delivery plan. The fact that the Committee (and the working group) had District Council representation was also conducive to this.

In addition, the Committee had been emphasising and urging the NHS on the need to explore any further additional funds that could be made available for delivering the project, which would have had to be delivered in stages with delays to the originally planned timetable had available funds remained limited to £600,000. As a result, in the summer of 2024, the ICB and Vale of White Horse District Council had further discussions to increase the CIL fund amount to provide a

total of £950,000 toward the project. The JHOSC welcomes this development and believes this will enable the project to be delivered in one tranche, without the need to phase its delivery. An additional fund of £100,000 will also be released by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust's charitable fund from a legacy intended for Wantage Community Hospital. Securing this fund was made feasible because of partnership working on the hospital's refurbishment. This additional charity fund will be utilised for providing an enhanced digital facility for the hospital.

Moreover, the Committee expressed its concerns on the potential impact that the removal of the Oxfordshire place director post could have on the project's delivery and the significant progress that had been achieved by that stage. It was partly the contributions of a place director which enabled the coproduction exercise to be completed in 2023 and which established clear communication channels between the ICB and the local community in Wantage. The chief executive of the ICB provided assurance at the BOB JHOSC meeting in November 2024 that the removal of the place director post would not have any negative impacts on the project for



Wantage.

iii. Working to improve Primary Care access and the use of Digital Technology through the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview Scrutiny Committee.

In 2024/25, the Committee has played a key role in scrutiny at the cross-county level of the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire, and Berkshire West geography. The BOB JHOSC includes Councillors from Oxfordshire County Council, as well as representatives from Buckinghamshire, West Berkshire, Wokingham, and Reading. This Committee focuses on scrutinising the Integrated Care System at a strategic, or 'system' level, rather than at the county level, which is primarily examined by the Oxfordshire JHOSC. Additionally, the BOB JHOSC investigates system-level developments that affect all member authorities collectively.

The BOB JHOSC convened a public meeting on 24 November 2024. As well as receiving an update on the changes to the ICB's operating model during this meeting, the BOB JHOSC had been actively involved in scrutinising two major strategies of the Integrated Care Board (ICB). The first is the Primary Care Strategy, which aims to enhance and transform the delivery of general practice, community pharmacy, optometry, and dentistry services within the BOB region. The second is the **Digital & Data Strategy**, which outlines the ICB's digital, data, and technology goals for the next three years.

Regarding the changes to the ICB's operating model, the BOB JHOSC strongly urged the ICB to retain its commitments to place. The Committee expressed concerns relating to potential dilutions of the ICB's place-based focus if the ICB were to increasingly centralise its operating model and functions. The BOB JHOSC also emphasised that if the ICB was expressing commitments to supporting initiatives taken by each of the three places to establish place convenors of their own, that it should clarify how this would be the case if such convenors would not be employees of the

ICB (meaning they may not have access to ICB data/intelligence in the same manner that an ICB Place Director post would).

Regarding the Primary Care Strategy, the BOB JHOSC received an update after having initially reviewed this as part of an item held in its meeting in January 2024. The Committee reiterated its recommendation for there to be greater transparency around the use of physician associates or administrative staff who were involved in triaging or treating patients, as well as over the existence of any competency frameworks that were being adopted to maximise patient safety and reassurance. Another key point emphasised by the Committee was the imperative for coproduction to remain at the forefront of the ongoing design and implementation of the strategy. Given that the strategy could have significant implications on how front facing primary care services are configured and provided, it is pivotal that patients and service users within the BOB geography have opportunities to provide input into a crucial component of healthcare services in local communities. The BOB JHOSC therefore agreed to issue the following recommendation to the ICB in relation to the strategy:

‘To ensure that coproduction remains at the heart of the design and delivery of primary care services. It is recommended that acute providers and local authorities are engaged with on any planned changes to primary care services.’

The Committee is yet to receive a formal response to this recommendation, although the ICB has provided indications that they are adopting coproduction as part of the strategy. Moving forward, the BOB JHOSC will continue to request a formal response to this recommendation, and will be requesting evidence to indicate the degree to which coproduction is being exercised.

Another significant contribution made by the BOB JHOSC in regard to primary care scrutiny was the decision made to write to the Secretary of State for Health and Social Care to highlight the potential implications of the government’s announced increases in the Living Wage and National Insurance Contributions on General Practice. The Committee highlighted to the government that there would be significant financial and operational challenges faced by GP surgeries in BOB due to increases in the living wage and national insurance contributions; and that while aimed at improving the economic welfare of workers, could hinder the functioning and sustainability of GP practices. The BOB JHOSC received a response from the Secretary of State with an acknowledgement of its concerns, and a commitment by the government to increase funding for general practice for 2025/26 with an increase of 7.2 per cent in cash terms. The response also outlined that the government would begin discussions on the annual GP contract, and that the matter of the employers’ National Insurance increase would be dealt with as part of that process.

In relation to the Digital and Data Strategy, the Committee urged the ICB and its chief executive officer (who attended the meeting on 22 November 2024) to exercise further transparency around the use of technology and how this will be governed and monitored, particularly in an age where health systems could make increasing use of Artificial Intelligence.

Looking forward, the Oxfordshire JHOSC will continue to actively participate in BOB JHOSC scrutiny, with a view to receiving further updates on developments in primary care and on any further changes to the ICB’s operating model. Such updates will be particularly crucial given the government’s recent plans to cut ICB running costs by 50 percent and the prospect of ICB’s losing their provider oversight roles.

iv. Securing further resource for Epilepsy Services

The Committee conducted an in-depth review of epilepsy services during its meeting on 12 September 2024. To provide some context, the Committee had received written evidence at its previous public meeting on 16 January 2024 from the voluntary sector (SUDEP Action and Epilepsy Action), as well as from Professor Marian Knight (University of Oxford). The letter from Professor Knight concerned the findings of MBRRACE (Mothers and Babies: Reducing Risk through Audits and Confidential Enquiries) of a near doubling of sudden deaths against a backdrop of the introduction of the Pregnancy Prevention Programme. The third sector raised a red flag to the Committee about the likely local safety impacts on residents and impacts on all stakeholders of a new national framework that valproate must not be started in new patients (male or female) younger than 55 years, unless two specialists independently consider and document that there is no other effective or tolerated treatment. The Committee was alerted to this being a very dramatic shift in clinical practice.

The Committee wrote to Steve Brine MP, Chair of the Parliamentary Health Select Committee in January 2024, requesting national scrutiny of the MHRA (Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency) alert, the proposed timescales for implementation, the lack of a national impact assessment, and the lack of resources to support the new requirements. The Committee received a response that this was included on the list of potential scrutiny items for the Parliamentary Select Committee. Additionally, in April 2024, the Committee received the ICB local impact assessment on the MHRA Pregnancy Prevention Update of November 2023. The impact report outlined that there were unavoidable consequences, and current services were ill-equipped to handle the implementation.

Having received the evidence, the Committee conducted a deep-dive into the current state of epilepsy services at its 12 September 2024 meeting, receiving two reports on this item: from Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and NHS England South-East Region. The Committee's areas of interest included: the health inequalities implications surrounding epilepsy; the number of full-time equivalent neurologists/specialists and patterns of demand on clinical time and pressures; the steps being taken to address sudden death in epilepsy; and the local impacts of the MHRA regulations on Valproate and Topirimate.

Through the evidence it received and its own investigations, it became apparent to the Committee that there were especially severe local impacts due to poor provision of the epilepsy service and because of unfunded and unbalanced national mandatory policies. Therefore, the Committee issued the following recommendations to the ICB, Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, and NHSE South-East Region.

For the ICB and Oxford University Hospitals NHSFT to:

- ▶ Give priority to patient safety for people with epilepsy and their families in Oxfordshire, and to the welfare of the Oxfordshire epilepsy team, and to set out how that priority will be addressed through their governance and management at a board level. The governance and management of these priorities should also be inclusive of people with lived experience and their charity representatives, as well as their concerns regarding tailored and balanced communications and the use of existing empowerment tools.
- ▶ To secure further funding and resource for epilepsy services.

For NHS England South-East Region to:

- Give support to the ICB and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to help achieve the above prioritisations.

A key success for the Committee was that through bringing some of its evidence to the local and regional NHS bodies, its above recommendations were accepted; with both Oxford University Hospitals and NHSE South-East committing to working to secure further resource toward epilepsy services.

The Committee also submitted a separate recommendation to Oxfordshire County Council's cabinet, urging it to consider the likely impacts of the Valproate policy for the local authority commissioning arrangements and the provision of safe residential care and out of county placements. It was also recommended that the Cabinet Member for Public Health and the Director of Public Health consider the epilepsy population as part of the Council's programme to tackle public health inequalities. The cabinet partially accepted this recommendation and committed to examining the impact of the valproate policy on the services they commission for special education and residential care for children and adults with learning disabilities and/or autism (who may be affected by patient safety concerns).

The Committee also wrote to Karyn Smith MP (Minister of State for Secondary Care) on 18 October 2024, urging greater resource to be allocated to epilepsy services, and for the suspension the MHRA regulatory updates of 2024 pending an independent national review of the UK's Pregnancy Prevention Programme. Letters were also sent to Layla Moran MP (Chair of the Parliamentary Health Select Committee) urging for the Select Committee to embark on thorough scrutiny of the Pregnancy Prevention Programme, and to NHSE Specialist Commissioning to ask for greater resource allocations for epilepsy services in Oxfordshire. To date, a response was received from Layla Moran's office, with a commitment to add this topic to the list of considerations for items for the Parliamentary Select Committee work programme.

v. Promoting healthier advertising and restrictions on fast food outlets in Oxfordshire:

Excess weight poses significant challenges to healthy living, being a leading cause of early deaths. Excess weight levels also raise susceptibility to a vast array of health conditions (including some cancers and Type 2 diabetes) and can also worsen one's mental health. For children, this can result in reduced educational performance and for adults increased sickness in employment. An individual's overall life expectancy can also be reduced by obesity.

It is for these reasons that the JHOSC continued to retain a spotlight on the measures taken by Oxfordshire County Council and its key NHS partners to promote healthier weight amongst Oxfordshire's residents. The Committee continues to stress that tackling excess weight should remain a key priority for both the Health and Wellbeing Board as well as the Health Improvement Board in Oxfordshire.

In its 21 November 2024 public meeting, the JHOSC commissioned and received a report which provided an update on the work undertaken by system partners to promote Healthy Weight. The report received included input from Oxfordshire County Council's Public Health team, as well as from the ICB. The Committee initially examined this topic in its September 2023 public meeting, and sought to receive a progress update on the work undertaken by the Council and its partners to promote healthy weight, as well as on the recommendations issued by the Committee last year. Some of the insights sought by the Committee involved: details of any new data relating to excess weight in Oxfordshire; any ongoing coproduction that had been adopted as part of the work to tackle excess weight; and an update on the licensing of both fast-food outlets and advertising of HFSS (High in Fat, Salt and Sugar) products.

The Committee issued a key recommendation calling for the development of clear and measurable Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) so as to evaluate the impacts and progress of the work to promote healthy weight. This recommendation was accepted by system partners, with expressed commitments to continuing to work with a clear action plan associated with healthy weight which includes KPIs. These KPIs would then be reported to the Health Improvement Board.

In addition, the Committee issued another recommendation on the imperative for ongoing coproduction of healthy weight services that could include input from those with comorbidities or from vulnerable population groups. This recommendation was also accepted, and whilst it may be difficult or potentially inappropriate to be seeking out individuals systematically, Oxfordshire County Council's public health team will now work on coproducing healthy weight services with organisations supporting such vulnerable residents. Moving forward, it would be ideal for the JHOSC to receive further information on which particular organisations had been approached, and on which vulnerable population groups are represented by these organisations.

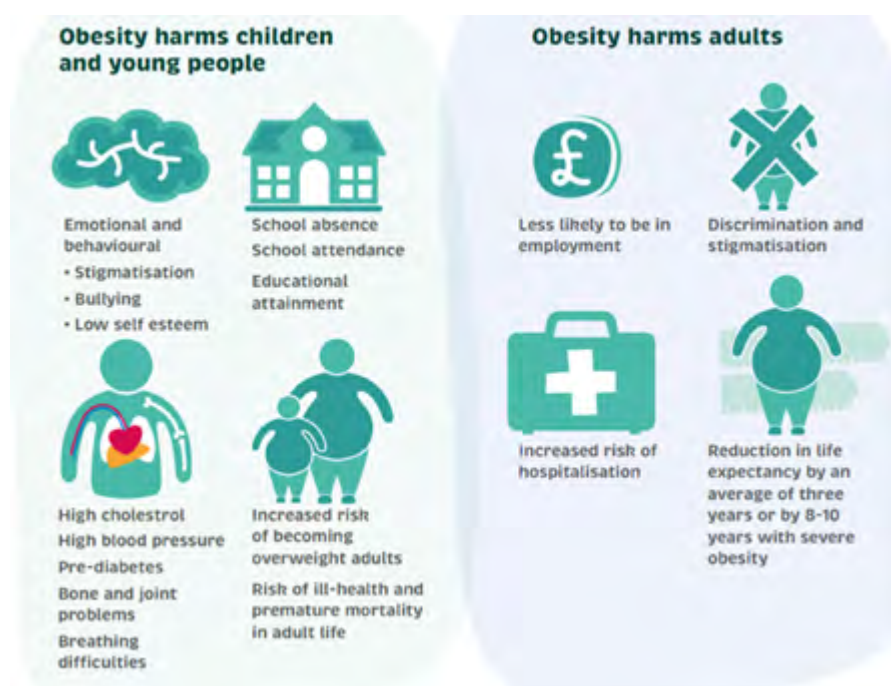
Furthermore, the Committee also agreed to and submitted two letters to both Oxford City Council and Cherwell District Council in relation to urging both councils to adopt policies that:

1. Promote healthier food advertising.
2. Restrict the opening of new hot food takeaway shops in areas with the highest level of childhood obesity and in close proximity to schools.

The Committee shared evidence it received from the County Council's public health team around which particular areas of Oxford City and Cherwell contained populations with the highest levels of excess weight; and urged both Councils to build on their own work to support the health and wellbeing of residents by taking a number of crucial steps to address the advertising of unhealthy food products as well as the presence of new hot food takeaway shops.

The JHOSC sought to reassure both Councils that they need not be concerned, if indeed it was a concern about losing revenue as a result of implementing healthier advertising policies for two reasons:

1. These policies would not require a ban on any particular brand from advertising, only that brands would have to switch to advertising healthier products that they are able to offer customers.
2. To date of the local authorities who had implemented such policies, none have reported revenue losses. For example, Haringey Council confirmed that there had been no loss in revenue as a result of allocating advertisement places to advertisers of non-HFSS products.

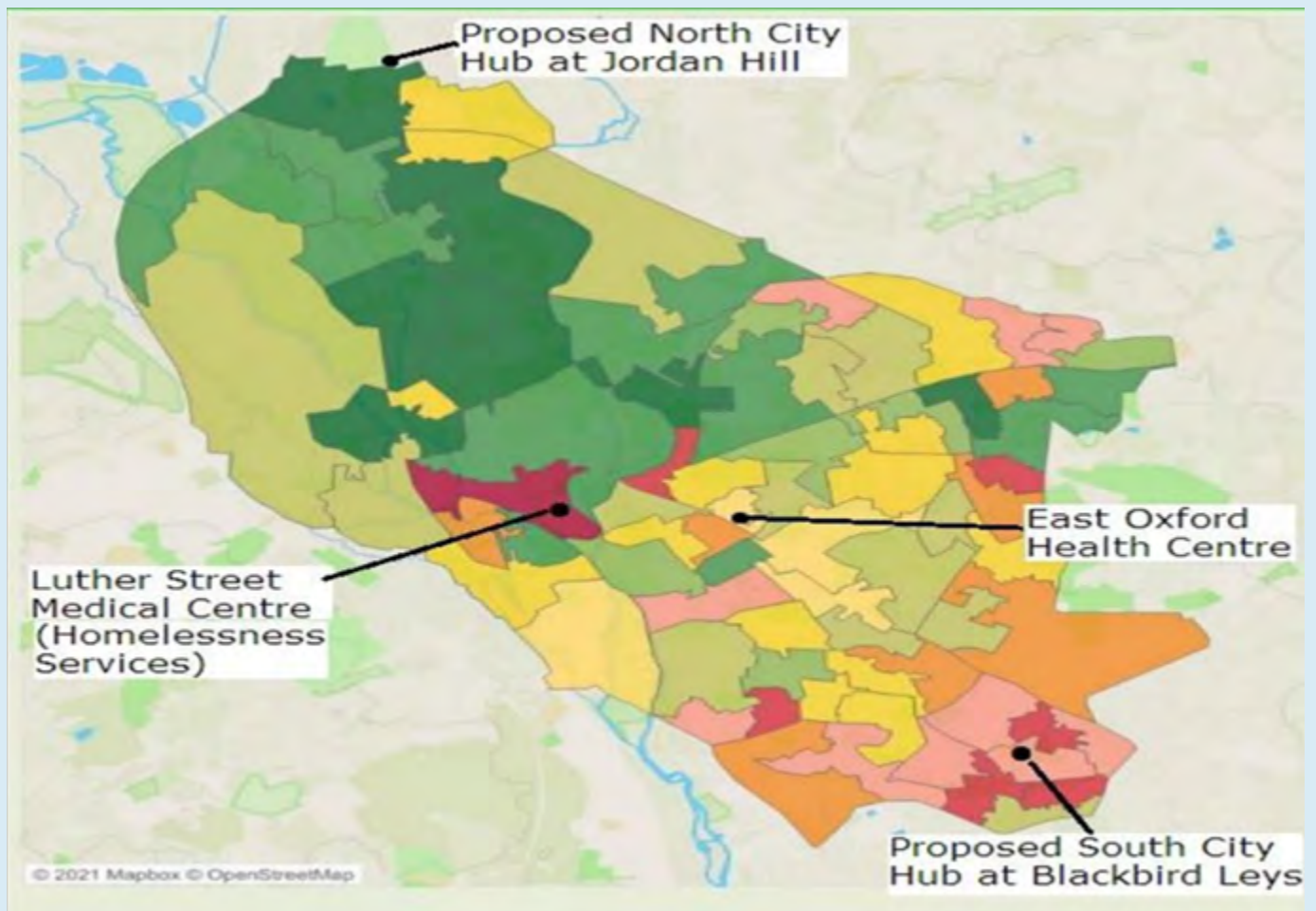


4 Other key highlights of HOSC activity

Supporting improvements in community health provision via the Oxford Community Health Hubs Project::

A key area of JHOSC scrutiny had been around the Oxford Community Health Hubs Project launched by Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. The purpose of this project is to integrate primary, community, and dental care services within Oxford City (comprising 300 staff, 40 teams, and nine existing bases) into three hubs. The Trust believes that the integration of such community-

based services into three key hubs will enable a more effective delivery of these services to patients in their communities. The project aims to establish three health hubs, each located in the North, Centre, and the South of the City respectively. Below is a map of where these Hubs will be established:



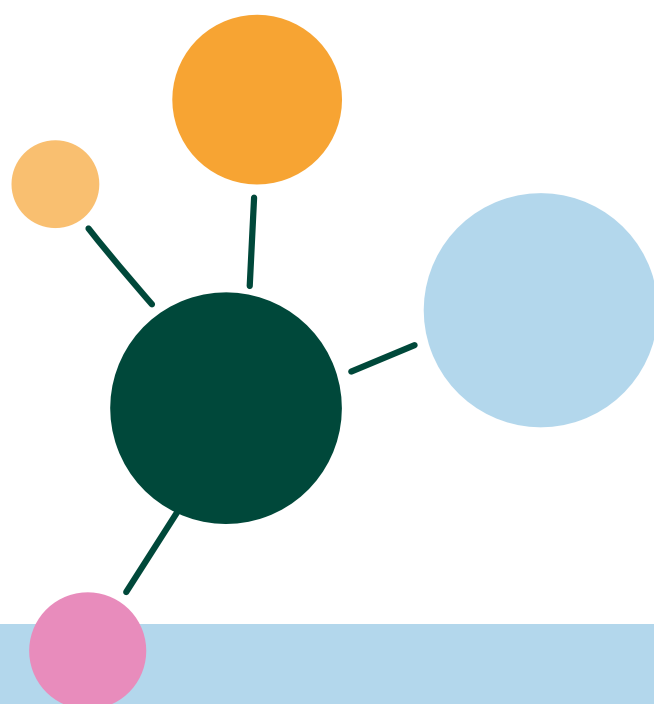
The JHOSC has scrutinised the progress made against this project via its Oxford Community Health Hubs (OCHH) working group (which was established in January 2024). The working group held four meetings with representatives from Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust in the previous municipal year on 11 July 2024, 11 September 2024, 9 December 2024, and on 4 March 2025. The working group, on behalf of the JHOSC, had and continues to express its support for this project as it could lead to better health and care outcomes for patients in Oxford City who rely on these community-based services. For instance, the services within the scope of this project that patients will benefit from include children's services (including therapies and community nursing), community nursing and therapy for adults, podiatry, community specialist services (including dietetics and respiratory services), and dental community services. The hubs will also host quality and directorate management teams.

The JHOSC working group believes that these health hubs would serve as a space for the co-location of health and care professionals that provide services to local communities. The increasingly multidisciplinary nature of community healthcare necessitates greater integration and collaboration between both clinical and managerial/administrative teams, which the working group believes these hubs can help foster through accommodating various professionals and staff in single and larger integrated hubs.

Nonetheless, the working group, on behalf of the Committee, urged the Trust to strongly consider the likely impacts of integrating these community services into large hubs on both staff as well as accessibility for patients. In terms of staff, whilst there could be benefits in creating integrated multidisciplinary working and a pleasant physical work environment, some services are delivered through clinics that will change location by a few miles to a new, purpose-built clinical facility better equipped to deliver patient care (e.g. dental, podiatry). This change could impact some

patients and staff who attend these clinics. To help remedy this, the JHOSC working group had facilitated early discussions between the County Council's Transport Services and the Trust for the purposes of exploring avenues to allow easier access for staff and patients to these hubs. This included facilitating contact with Transport services officers as well as the Council's Cabinet Member for Transport, who was invited to attend one of the working group meetings with the Trust. A key point raised by the working group was the imperative for staff who conduct home visits from these hubs to be able to easily access patients who happen to reside on roads with restrictions. Extensive travel planning should therefore form a key part of the Trust's engagements with its staff and patients/carers; particularly for those who may experience impacts with transportation and accessibility.

The working group will continue to engage in scrutiny of key developments in this project, as this represents a new model of community healthcare provision that should be handled delicately, with all variables and dependencies taken into account. At the time of writing this annual report, the next working group meeting with the Trust is scheduled to take place at the North City Health Hub. This will constitute a briefing as well as an opportunity for all members of the JHOSC to witness first hand the progress made in establishing the North City Hub.



Scrutinising improvements to Maternity Services:

Maternity services play a crucial role in supporting the health and wellbeing of mothers and their babies. These services encompass prenatal care, delivery, and postnatal support, each phase being instrumental in ensuring healthy outcomes for both mother and child. With this in mind, the Committee was also alarmed by key developments around maternity services including the outcome of a CQC inspection in 2023, as well as the publication of a dossier by Keep the Horton General (KTHG) which outlined the experiences of several mothers and families who had experienced difficult births in Oxfordshire.

The JHOSC commissioned a report from Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, which was discussed during its public meeting on 21 November 2024, with a view to examining the steps taken by the Trust and its partners to overcome the challenges around maternity services throughout the County.

The challenging experiences of service users served as an indication as to not only the challenges with maternity, but also in the specific lines of enquiry and recommendations that the Committee adopted as part of its scrutiny.

Some of the themes the JHOSC investigated included: details of any partners, stakeholders or patients that had been engaged with for the purposes of coproducing and improving maternity services; data on local trends with regard to injuries, deaths, and birth trauma; and the specific actions taken to improve maternity services in ways that address concerns raised by the CQC and the KTHG birth dossier.

The Committee was also of the view that staff should be thoroughly supported throughout the process of improving Oxfordshire's maternity services. This should include a two-pronged approach of not only ensuring that staff receive appropriate training, but that they are also not

subjected to any additional negative pressures in addition to existing pressures they are facing as frontline healthcare workers. In an informal briefing held with the Trust, the Committee urged the Trust's Chief Executive and Chief Medical Officer to ensure that a careful balance was achieved in regard to generating improvements whilst upholding staff wellbeing.

As part of its scrutiny of maternity services, the JHOSC laid emphasis on and issued some key recommendations (which were accepted) around some of the areas highlighted below. Below is also a brief outline of the indications of how some of these recommendations had been accepted and how the Trust is taking steps to take these recommendations from the Committee on board:

3. The Committee recommended that maternity staff received ongoing training around improving maternity services, and that staff should also be trained in patient-centred care. The Trust accepted this recommendation, and committed to enhance communication skills training for all maternity staff, with an emphasis on empathy, compassion, and kindness. The Trust would also be conducting monthly reviews and monitoring through the Trust's training compliance portal, with the aim of reporting progress through clinical governance processes.
4. The Committee also recommended for the development of a maternity trauma care pathway for ongoing support for mothers (and their partners) to include those who had experienced difficult births, complications, premature babies, still births and bereavement. This recommendation was also accepted, with the Trust committing to continued working with Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust on a shared Birth Trauma Pathway. The Trust will also work alongside specialised mental health midwives to identify and address any mental health concerns that may require different referrals.

5. Another key point raised and recommended by the Committee was around the importance of coproduction remaining at the heart of the design as well as the improvements of Maternity Services. The Trust accepted this recommendation, and plans to continue to coproduce improvement activities with the Oxfordshire Maternity and Neonatal Voices Partnership, healthcare professionals, service users, family members, and relevant system partners to discuss and review Maternity Services. The Trust will also continue to create channels for service users and families to provide feedback on these services, and will utilise this feedback to make continuous improvements.

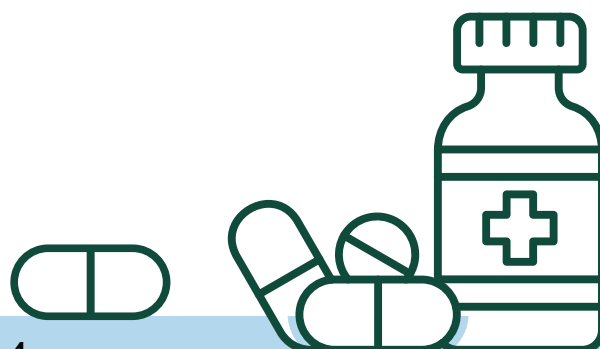


The JHOSC is pleased to see some of the initial steps embarked upon by Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to improve maternity services, and will continue to engage in scrutiny of this area moving forward with a view to receiving concrete evidence as to how improvements have been made and achieved.

Securing local and national mitigations to tackle Medicine Shortages:

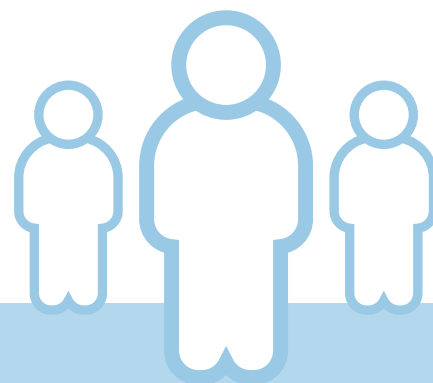
The Committee has received several reports of medicine shortages impacting local residents. The JHOSC understands that such shortages are also national in scope and are occurring as a result of several complex and interacting factors which often erupt at short notice and that can rapidly change. It is for this reason that the Committee commissioned reports (for its 12 September 2024) meeting from the ICB as well as Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust to further investigate the causes of medicine shortages, the impacts such shortages were having on patients, and the steps being taken by local NHS system partners to address this.

A key concern for the Committee were the implications and risks this could have on patients. Community Pharmacy England conducted a survey with pharmacy teams across England, which outlined that 97% of pharmacy teams reported patients being inconvenienced as a result of medicine supply issues, and 79% reported that patient health is at risk due to these issues. The Committee also received a statement on Medicine Shortages from Dr Leyla Hannbeck (Chief Executive of the Independent Pharmacies Association [IPA]), and the Committee agreed with the IPAs concern around the lack of transparency regarding the supply of medicines. The Committee also supports the IPA's view that the DHSC should bring healthcare professionals on the frontline, as well as wholesalers, suppliers and patient groups together to discuss these challenges with a view to explore solutions.



As part of its scrutiny of medicine shortages, the JHOSC laid emphasis on and issued some key recommendations around mitigating some of the challenges with medication shortages. All these recommendations were accepted by the ICB and Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. A summary of how these recommendations were accepted is below:

- 1.** The JHOSC recommended that efforts were made to reduce the prospect of additional excessive workloads on both clinical and administrative staff in the event of medicine shortages, and for staff to be provided with meaningful support as well as additional resource if need be for the purposes of tackling any additional demand/burdens. This recommendation was accepted, with the ICB and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust committing to minimising the impact on staff workloads through coordination with national bodies and the use of national resources to help to support this. There is a dedicated Medicines Supply Shortages practitioner at Oxford University Hospitals who will lead on this local and national coordination to mitigate excessive burdens on staff.
- 2.** The Committee also recommended that there was effective communication, coordination, and transparency within and between the local and national levels to help mitigate risks associated with medicine shortages. The ICB accepted this recommendation, with a commitment by its Medicines Optimisation Team to provide advice to local practices and community pharmacies on medicine shortages and communicating current shortages and suitable alternatives via its regular newsletter and website, both of which are available to all primary care clinicians. The team will also add certain information to ScriptSwitch, which is a software tool used by prescribers to provide real-time information and recommendations at the point of prescribing.
- 3.** The JHOSC issued a strong recommendation for there to be processes in place to recognise and identify patients with cliff-edge conditions, and to ensure that mitigations are in place to reduce the risk of harm to these patients in the event of supply disruptions. This recommendation was also accepted by the ICB and Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust, with expressed commitments to closely monitor national impact assessments, which would determine which shortages were deemed higher risk or those that were expected to have the most impact. These impact assessments and determinations are communicated specifically, in the form of a Medicine Supply Notification (MSN) or National Patient Safety Alert (NatPSA). There would also be local observations of any Serious Shortage Protocols (SSPs) when these are put in place. This would then enable community pharmacists to supply patients with specific alternative medicines; which are available to view on the NHS Business Service Authority's dedicated SSP web page, along with any supporting guidance.

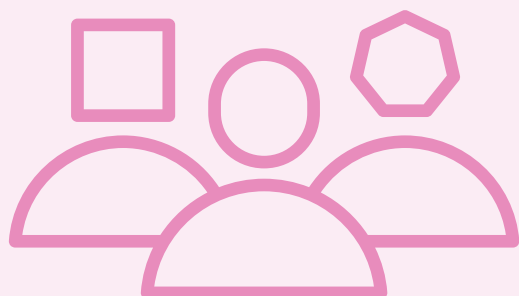


5 Looking ahead to 2024/25



Staffing and capacity

The Committee continues to produce a significant number of recommendations as well as reports which are being issued to the NHS and to a lesser extent Oxfordshire County Council's Cabinet. Within the previous municipal year 2024/2025, the Committee benefited from additional support from a democratic support officer. This has contributed to undertaking the administrative work associated with the Committee's business. This additional support has allowed Scrutiny Officer time to be diverted to higher-value work, enabling the Committee to be better informed through briefing and research, building stronger relationships and closer joint-working with system partners at local and national levels, and contributing more to the output of the BOB HOSC.



Co-optees:

The JHOSC's membership allows room for three co-optees. Again, the presence of co-optees adds two key values to the Committee's work. First, such members are recruited based on the level of expertise they have with health services in Oxfordshire, which provides professional and insightful reflections for the JHOSC in determining what to scrutinise and how to do so. Second, given that they are recruited outside the County Council, they do not necessarily have a clear affiliation with any political party, enabling the JHOSC to receive apolitical stances and contributions.

In last year's annual report, it was highlighted that there were two vacant co-optee posts on the Committee. Since then, a recruitment exercise was launched, and one further co-optee has been recruited. Sylvia Buckingham applied for the advertised vacancy, and was interviewed by a panel comprising the Health Scrutiny Officer, Chair and Vice-Chair of the JHOSC on Wednesday 09 October 2024. The Panel recommended to the Committee that Sylvia Buckingham be appointed as a co-optee member of the JHOSC. She was formally appointed at the 21 November 2024 public meeting. Since then, Sylvia has actively participated in the Committee's work, providing extensive input into the JHOSC's forward work planning and has contributed to the drafting of key lines of enquiry and recommendations for public meetings. Sylvia brings a wealth of expertise from her background as a nurse and as an academic, and is also a Healthwatch Oxfordshire Trustee and a patient safety partner at Oxford University Hospitals NHS Foundation Trust. This experience provides further perspective and reflections into the JHOSC's scrutiny of health services.

The Committee seeks in the course of the coming civic year to fill its final vacancy.



Practicing Equality, Diversity and Inclusion:

A key commitment outlined in last year's Annual Report was to increasing diversity and engagement, in addition to further public involvement in Scrutiny. In continuation of the trend from the year before last, there has been an ongoing improvement in the diversity of public speakers who have registered to speak at HOSC meetings. The Committee had a total of 13 public speakers within the last civic year. The public speakers were from a variety of backgrounds and organisations, and spoke on a range of issues including epilepsy, medicine shortages, and SEND services. The Health Scrutiny Officer will work with the JHOSC Chair to explore ways to increase opportunities for further public input into health scrutiny. Allowing greater public input would contribute toward the JHOSC's perspectives and insights into key issues being experienced by patients who use health services.

Furthermore, as part of the process of improving equality, diversity and inclusion, the JHOSC is committed to appointing its third co-optee from a BAME (Black and Asian Minority Ethnic) background. This would enable further input and expertise to be received from a BAME perspective. The Committee understands and recognises that there are specific and unique challenges that BAME residents can experience, both in terms of their own health and wellbeing, as well as in terms of their experiences with health services. Hence, appointing a BAME co-optee would constitute a lot more than a tick box exercise of ensuring greater ethnic representation on the Committee, and will also yield further tangible benefits for how the Committee recognises, understands, and investigates the experiences of ethnic minorities. This is also in keeping with the overall principles of Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion which Oxfordshire County Council is committed to as a local authority encompassing a geography containing a diverse ethnic footprint.

Future items of scrutiny:

Noting that the new membership has control over its Forward Work Programme there are a variety of themes that could constitute potential items of scrutiny in the ensuing municipal year for the JHOSC. These include ongoing scrutiny of existing priorities and new developments and may include:

Abolition of NHS England:

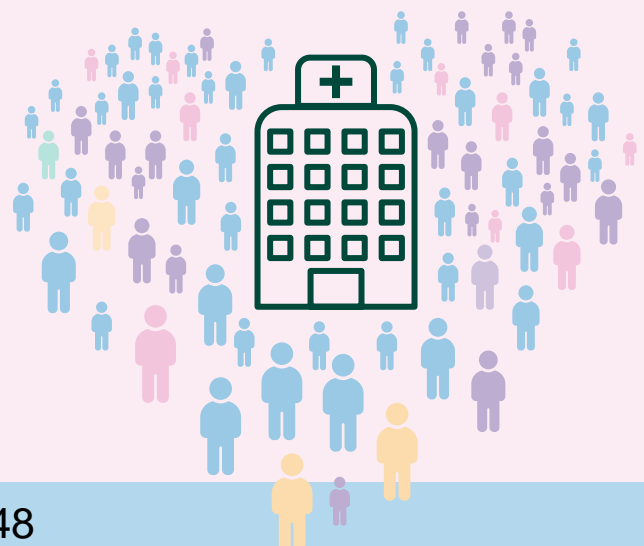
The government made a series of recent announcements that could significantly impact the health and care landscape both nationally and locally; including on how services are commissioned and delivered. The changes include:

4. The abolition of NHS England and its integration into the Department of Health and Social Care.
5. The need for ICB's to reduce their running costs by 50 percent.
6. The prospect of ICB's losing their provider oversight function.

These changes will naturally have a significant impact on the local health landscape, and the Committee will seek to champion patient outcomes throughout the process.

Primary Care:

Access to GP and dentistry services, should also constitute a key focus of ongoing scrutiny for the JHOSC. The Committee last examined GP and dentistry services in the municipal year before last, and the time is ripe for further in-depth reviews into the steps being taken to increase access to primary care. The Committee had previously raised concerns around population increases as well as rising residential developments. In line with previously made recommendations to the ICB on this, the Committee should therefore review the degree to which efforts have been made to secure further funding for primary care estates. Collaboration between the ICB and District Councils will be crucial in this regard for the purposes of coordinating the use of available funds. Further reassurances should also be sought around how the ICB is working to avert the prospects and appearances of dentistry deserts throughout the County, particularly in rural areas (which can often be elicited by practices refusing to provide NHS treatments as a result of less rewarding NHS dentistry contracts).



Health and wellbeing strategy outcomes framework:



The Committee continues to support the ongoing development and delivery of Oxfordshire's health and wellbeing strategy, and recognises the collective efforts of system partners in this regard. To build on its ongoing scrutiny of the strategy's implementation, it is crucial to retain a spotlight on the outcomes framework developed by the Health and Wellbeing Board, and to receive regular updates on the incremental evaluation of the strategy's delivery by the Board. The strategy is in the process of being evaluated in stages, with the Board incrementally focusing on certain key strategy priorities at each of its meetings.



Children's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Services:

The Committee previously examined Oxfordshire's Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy for Children in its November 2023 meeting. The Committee agreed on the imperative for there to be a follow-up update on key progress made around the strategy's delivery and how it produced tangible benefits to the emotional wellbeing and mental health of Oxfordshire's youngest residents. The Committee examined the theme of children's emotional wellbeing as part of its scrutiny of this year's Director of Public Health (DPH) Annual Report (which focused primarily on this area), and it will be crucial to examine how the commitment and recommendations outlined in this year's DPH Annual Report interlinked with the objectives and Key Performance Indicators being utilised in the context of the Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health Strategy. This is an important area of policy given the increases in mental health decline amongst children and young people, particularly since the Covid-19 pandemic.





For further information on the Committee, and its work, see the links and contact details below:

[Committee details - Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny](#)

Chair: Cllr Jane Hanna OBE
jane.hanna@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Contact Officer: Dr Omid Nouri
omid.nouri@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Divisions Affected – All

COUNTY COUNCIL

08 July 2025

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. The Council is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - a) Receive the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report

Executive Summary

2. This report invites the Council to consider the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report and formally receive it.

Background

3. Within the Council's Constitution at Part 6.2 paragraph 4 (viii) the overview and scrutiny committees are given the right to submit an annual report. This is given effect through an Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.
4. It should be noted that the Council's Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee has its own constitutional requirements under Part 6.1B paragraph 23 of the Constitution, which requires the production and dissemination of a specific annual report for the work of this particular committee. That annual report is therefore being presented to Council as a separate item. It is, however, linked to within the current annual report. Comment around the challenges and future aspirations for the Scrutiny function are equally relevant to Health and non-Health committees.

Financial Implications

5. There are no financial implications associated with the formal receipt of the Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report.

Comments checked by: Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner,
drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

6. The Local Government Act 2000 introduced a new political governance system for local councils in England and Wales, requiring them to have a separate 'executive' in the form of a leader, or elected mayor, and cabinet. The Council has a Leader and Cabinet system of governance.
7. Under Section 9F(1) of the Local Government Act 2000 Executive arrangements by a local authority must include provision for the appointment by the authority of one or more committees of the authority referred to as overview and scrutiny committees.
8. The powers set out in the Local Government Act 2000 include the power to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge of any functions which are the responsibility of the executive and in connection with those powers to make reports or recommendations to the authority.
9. Part 6.2 paragraph 4(viii) of the Council's constitution provides scrutiny committees with the ability to "report annually to full Council on their work and make recommendations for future work programmes as appropriate."

Comments checked by: Kim Sawyer, Interim Head of Legal and Governance,
kim.sawyer@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Annex 1 – Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

Background papers: None

Contact Officer: Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager
tom.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

July 2025

July 2025

Scrutiny

annual report

2024/25



1 Introduction

The past year has been a period of significant activity and progress for the Overview and Scrutiny¹ function at Oxfordshire County Council (the Council). Its primary focus has continued to ensure that the council's decisions and policies are subject to rigorous examination and that they reflect the needs and aspirations of our community. Through comprehensive reviews, public engagement, and collaborative efforts with various service areas, the Overview and Scrutiny Committees have strived to enhance transparency, accountability, and effectiveness in local governance.

This annual report provides an overview of the function's key areas of focus and recommendations, highlighting the impact of our work on the council's operations and the community at large.

The report covers a twelve month period from 1 June 2024 to 1 May 2025, largely covering the 2024-2025 municipal year.

¹ Unless overview is specifically mentioned the term 'scrutiny' refers to both overview and scrutiny. A distinction is often drawn between 'overview' which focuses on the development of policy, and 'scrutiny' which looks at decisions that have been made or are about to be made to ensure they are fit for purpose.



What is scrutiny?

In the Council most major decisions are taken by the Cabinet members, either through ‘single member decisions’ or formal meetings of the whole Cabinet. The Cabinet is made up of elected councillors from the controlling political administration. During the municipal year 2024-25 this was a minority Liberal Democrat/Green administration.

In operating an ‘executive’ (Cabinet) decision-making governance model, the Council is required by law to have an Overview and Scrutiny (“Scrutiny”) function, made up of elected councillors who are not on the Cabinet. The Scrutiny function acts as a counterweight to the Cabinet, empowering its cross-party membership of ‘backbench’ councillors to hold the Cabinet and its decision takers to account for the Council’s performance and its decisions, and to strengthen council decision-making. An Overview and Scrutiny Committee (Scrutiny Committee) can

also investigate any issue that affects the county or its residents, regardless of whether it is within the direct responsibility of the Cabinet. The work of Scrutiny helps to provide assurance that the Council is performing well, delivering value for money, and taking the best decisions it can to improve public services and the quality of life for the residents of Oxfordshire through influencing existing policy and informing policy development.

A Scrutiny Committee has no power to require that decisions be reversed or policies changed. It operates in a very similar fashion to Parliament’s select committees in that it seeks to engage relevant and informed individuals, consider policy or performance in light of the evidence gathered and present, in what is referred to as a ‘critical friend’ approach, recommendations for the relevant decision-maker to consider how improvements might be made. When Scrutiny makes a recommendation it is a legal duty that the recommendation be responded to in writing by the relevant Council decision-maker.



The Shape of Scrutiny at Oxfordshire County Council

The Scrutiny function at the Council has six Committees:

- 1. Education and Young People**
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 2. Performance and Corporate Services**
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 3. Place** Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 4. People** Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 5. Oxfordshire Joint Health**
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- 6. Horton Joint Health**
Overview and Scrutiny Committee

This report primarily focuses on the work of the Education and Young People, Performance and Corporate Services, Place and People Overview and Scrutiny Committees.

The Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee as a joint Committee (meaning it includes members of the district and city councils within Oxfordshire) has its own reporting arrangements and published its annual report, which was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee has not met during the reporting period but was established by the Oxfordshire Joint Health Scrutiny Committee, meaning any activity would be included within the Health Scrutiny Annual Report.

Overview and Scrutiny function



Cllr Eddie Reeves (chair)

Performance and Corporate
Services



Cllr Liam Walker (chair)

Place



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)

Education and Young People



Cllr Kieron Mallon (chair)

People

Membership
Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair)
Cllr Bob Johnston (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Brad Baines
Cllr Arash Fatemian
Cllr Damian Haywood
Cllr Kieron Mallon
Cllr Ian Middleton (until April 2025)
Cllr Calum Miller
Cllr Glynis Phillips
Cllr Alison Rooke (for April 2025)

Membership
Cllr Liam Walker (Chair)
Cllr Robin Bennett (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Felix Bloomfield
Cllr Duncan Enright
Cllr Charlie Hicks
Cllr Susanna Pressel
Cllr Nigel Simpson
Cllr Bethia Thomas

Membership
Cllr Nigel Simpson (Chair)
Cllr Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Liz Brighouse OBE
Cllr Ian Corkin
Cllr Trish Elphinstone
Cllr Andy Graham
Cllr Sally Povolotsky
Cllr Roz Smith
Cllr Michael Waine
Fraser Long – Catholic representative co-optee
Toby Long – Anglican representative co-optee
Hana G – Young Person co-optee (from February 2025)
Katie N – Young Person co-optee (from February 2025)
Peace Nhaji – Parent Governor co-optee (from February 2025)

Membership
Cllr Kieron Mallon (Chair)
Cllr Imade Edosomwan (Deputy Chair)
Cllr Kevin Bulmer
Cllr Trish Elphinstone
Cllr Andy Graham
Cllr Jenny Hannaby
Cllr Nick Leverton
Cllr Alison Rooke
Cllr Michael Waine

2 Scrutiny in numbers

Number of
meetings held

19

Reports
to cabinet

22

Members
of public involved
(public speakers)

18

Number of
substantive items
considered

42

Working
group reports

1

Click-throughs
to agendas

8,475

Working group
recommendations

20

Cabinet response breakdown
(based on responses received at time
of publication)

35 accepted (38.89 per cent)

9 partially accepted (10 per cent)

2 rejected (2.22 per cent)

44 no reply (48.89 per cent)

Scrutiny
recommendations

90

Scrutiny in numbers can provide interesting insights. However, it is important to recognise its limitations. Quality of scrutiny is more important than quantity, meaning that a higher number of substantive items is not necessarily a good thing.

Equally, when scrutiny has looked at an issue and not found anything it wishes to make a recommendation on it will not make a report to Cabinet. Lastly, there is no optimum number for what constitutes 'success' in terms of Scrutiny recommendations to Cabinet. This number will always be impacted by two variables: the value of the recommendation itself, and the willingness of an executive to engage with suggestions from Scrutiny.

These numbers tell us a number of things:

- An average of approximately substantive 2.2 items have been taken per meeting, which is a slight fall on the previous year, but closer to the recommendation of two by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny.
- The reduced number of items has led to an increase in the number of reports and recommendations going from Scrutiny to Cabinet: from 19 reports and 74 recommendations in 23/24, to 22 reports and 90 recommendations in 24/25, indicating a growing engagement in policy over the last year by Scrutiny.
- Almost no Scrutiny recommendations, only two, have been rejected by Cabinet. This suggests that Scrutiny's suggestions are worthwhile, and that the executive is willing to engage with good suggestions.

- The high number of recommendations with 'no reply' is simply a function of timing, with five reports, including a working group report with 20 recommendations being agreed at the very end of the reporting period and submitted afterwards. This does not indicate a systemic issue with recommendations not being responded to.
- Public involvement has been stable: with approximately one member of the public attending each Scrutiny Committee meeting. Its public reach is also illustrated by receiving over 700 click-throughs per month to its agendas.

Call-in

Call-in is a statutory function that enables councillors to challenge decisions that have been taken by an executive decision-maker, such as Cabinet or a Cabinet member, before they are implemented. This power was not used in the period covered by the report.

The Council's Constitution requires that provisions relating to call in are monitored annually. This process was undertaken as part of the Council's wider review of its Constitution. The revised process is clearer as to when a decision may be called in and the role of the Monitoring Officer, more consistent, whilst also reflecting the Council's need to become more agile in its decision-making as it becomes more commercial in approach.

3 Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

The principal areas of focus for the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee this year demonstrate the variety of levels at which the Council operates and can make positive differences to our residents. The Committee has delivered its central role through overseeing the operation of the Council and high standards of delivery of its own services, the management of costs and the sensible allocations of funds to meet future challenges.



Cllr Eddie Reeves (chair)

The Council does not deliver services in isolation and is a key partner for many wider challenges. The Committee has given particular attention to the Council's plans around local economic development following the transfer of those powers to the Council from the Local Enterprise Partnership. The Committee has considered the ways the Council ensures that the benefits of economic development are felt across the multiple geographies and communities of Oxfordshire. Finally, our local communities themselves exhibit huge commitment and innovation to supporting local residents and the Committee has devoted time to ensuring the provision of buildings is equitable, sustainable and effective. In making positive contributions to the Council's policy in these areas, the Committee has also sought to serve our residents and improve their lives both now and in the future.

I am deeply grateful to my fellow committee members for the perceptiveness, experience and cooperation brought to the work of the Committee, the Cabinet members and senior officers who have attended for their willingness to engage with the Scrutiny process, and to Tom Hudson and Ben Piper for their enabling work on behalf of the Committee. I wish the new Committee the best, and hope that it can continue to provide a valuable service to our residents.

Cllr Eddie Reeves, Chair of Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024/25

Membership

Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair)
 Cllr Bob Johnston (Deputy Chair)
 Cllr Brad Baines
 Cllr Arash Fatemian
 Cllr Damian Haywood
 Cllr Kieron Mallon
 Cllr Ian Middleton (until April 2025)
 Cllr Calum Miller
 Cllr Glynis Phillips
 Cllr Alison Rooke (for April 2025)

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held	Reports to cabinet	Working group reports
5	7	0
Click-throughs to agendas		1,866
Number of substantive items considered	Working group recommendations	0
8	Scrutiny recommendations	20
Members of public involved (public speakers)		1
Cabinet response breakdown*		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 9 accepted (45 per cent) 4 partially accepted (20 per cent) 2 rejected (10 per cent) 5 no reply (25 per cent) 		
*(based on responses received at time of publication)		

Key areas of focus and achievements

Budget

In England during the 2024/25 municipal year, no councils issued s.114 notices – sometimes referred to as declaring effective bankruptcy. Whilst this is an improvement on recent years, a total of 19 councils were provided with support by central government to manage financial pressures via the ‘Exceptional Financial Support’ process. This is a high figure, and illustrates the elevated level of financial strain local authorities are operating under nationally, a pressure from which Oxfordshire is far from immune. Scrutiny of the budget is typically the single most important contribution of the Committee.

In undertaking the Committee’s scrutiny of the budget it has to process the significant amount of data to produce its outcomes in a form that can be easily understood. The Committee submission to both Cabinet and Council draws out what members think are the key issues and contextual facts members and the public should be aware of, for instance the proposal to take on £65m Prudential Borrowing, to fund the Council’s Highway Network would, according to the s.151 officer, bring the Council’s borrowing to the maximum prudent level. Likewise, it was able to establish and clarify the simultaneous facts of the Council experiencing some unanticipated good news in terms of external funding, whilst facing a more challenging medium-term horizon as allocations of central government funding follow more closely national levels of deprivation. The Committee sought to ensure members were better informed on issues of particular concern, making recommendations to provide further information around issues such as school meals and flood defences.

In addition the Committee did make recommendations directly to change policy, for instance, recommending stepping required increases to the cost of school meals over a longer period to help parents and carers struggling with the cost of living. Recommendations were also made to improve the effectiveness of planned spend, arguing

in favour of more a formalised approach to prioritising active travel schemes and recognition of the compounding effect existing infrastructure has on active travel take-up when it forms part of a network with new proposals.

Economic Development

As referenced in relation to the Council's budget situation, whilst the financial pressure of the last year was less than anticipated, it remained significant and with a deteriorating outlook. To safeguard the services which our residents so highly value it is necessary that the Council maximises its commercial opportunities. It is in this context that the Committee provided scrutiny to the proposed Commercial Strategy.

Discussion of the proposals helped to clarify for members and officers the different meanings of 'commercial activity', the different approaches and timelines they would require, and the differing levels of risk, reward and risk-mitigation required. Driving better deals in contract negotiations is equally as commercial as establishing a local authority trading company, but must be approached in completely different ways.

Further, to bringing clarity to the scope of activity required, the Committee also contributed a number of specific recommendations, including being willing to urge investment through dedicated capacity to improve the Council's strategic commissioning and contract management to realise the potential savings available.

The Committee has sought regular updates and a project plan for the Commercial strategy, outlining specific commercial opportunities in development, enabling activity, timelines, targeted savings or expected income generation, risk and RAG ratings, which is expected to bring more rigour, monitoring and accountability to its progress across the Council.

The Council's engagement with the commercial sector is far from limited to its own commercial activity, particularly in view of central

government's decision in 2024 to pass the responsibilities of Local Enterprise Partnerships (LEPs) around business representation, strategic economic planning, and responsibility for the delivery of government programmes to upper tier authorities. Such is the importance accorded to this development that the Committee considered this item twice.

The first consideration was taken at the Committee's first meeting of the year and was primarily an overview of the expected process of integrating the Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership (OxLEP) into the Council. The report and discussion focused on governance issues, financial risks, plans for maintaining existing service levels, and when to expect greater clarity over what difference in policy would exist given the Council's assumption of responsibility. The main point made at this stage was the importance of ensuring a wide variety of businesses were represented and consulted as part of the changes.

The second report was taken in April 2025, allowing an eight month gap for progress to have been made. The Committee was provided with details around the legal processes taken to absorb the OxLEP (or Enterprise Oxfordshire, as it has been renamed) into the Council, the governance structures, and progress made in recruiting necessary new members to fulfil roles within the governance structure. Discussion focused on the suitability of the governance structure, and whether its degree of complexity was required to achieve its strategic objectives. The Committee pushed that there should be greater clarity also over the Council's ultimate ownership of any financial liabilities arising from Enterprise Oxfordshire. At the time of the meeting, the Enterprise Oxfordshire's Strategic Business Plan had not been agreed, meaning the Committee was unable to provide scrutiny on progress made against it. It intends, however, to review this issue at the end of the current municipal year (April 2026).

Community Wealth Building and Social Investment

Very much linked to the Council's commercial activity is the wish not simply to generate money, but to use commercial activity in a holistic sense to improve Oxfordshire as a place.

Indeed, one of the Council's key priorities is to work with local businesses and partners for environmental, economic and social benefit.

The Council worked with the Centre for Local Economic Strategies and received a number of recommendations, which were then further tested and developed, and aggregated to present the Council's approach towards 'community wealth building'.

Though the proposals covered multiple strands which were explored in depth, such as economic development, skills and employment, spending and procurement the most pressing area for discussion was over access to property, particularly the Council's Community Asset Transfer (CAT) policy, under which organisations can use surplus Council buildings. Given the level of interest, a full separate report was commissioned and considered at a later point in the year. This report looked at the scale of CAT transfers, the income generation and costs, the demand for space, the status of Covid-related rent concessions, and the outlines of a new light touch leasing policy for the voluntary sector.

The core outcomes of the Committee's consideration were to secure greater member involvement in plans to provide new leases or alter existing ones for buildings in their divisions, improved communications for members and residents about the plans and progress against plans for empty properties, and better working with partner organisations such as the district and city councils to widen the pool of potential buildings for applicants seeking them, whilst also allowing better planning and coordination between the different organisations to mitigate any issues arising, such as traffic increases.

Other Activity

BMMR

One area the Committee has moved away from scrutinising in recent years is the 'performance' element. The Council reports, through Cabinet, on its financial performance, its risk, and against a number of key performance indicators every two months through its Business Management and Monitoring Report. Formal scrutiny of this is important when it comes to the Council's external audit, illustrating robust internal monitoring procedures. On this basis, the Committee recommended its consideration of the BMMR report, and is expected to continue doing so.

4 Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

I very much enjoyed my time as a member of the Place Committee last year and I was delighted to be elected chair for this last year of the council term.

Transport, development, wildlife, community safety, flooding, nature recovery, roads, street lighting, rail, infrastructure funding: all these topics make a huge difference to day-to-day life and the committee has been keen to look into them in detail and to make a difference. That this committee business has been wide-ranging reflects both the diversity of members' interests but also the extensive impact of council activity on residents' lives.

The Council has some commendable ambitions and part of the Committee's role is to ensure that these ambitions are sensible, pragmatic, and achievable. The scrutiny of members of this committee has sought to make tangible difference to that and to offer value with the cross party non-partisan approach exemplified by members of the committee.

I am proud that this is precisely what we have done I'd like to thank officers for all their work both supporting the committee and appearing before it. I would like to thank in particular Paul Fermer and Robin Rogers and their respective

teams for appearing so enthusiastically and engaging so constructively. I would also like to thank Cllr Gant, Cllr Roberts, and Cllr Sudbury as the relevant Cabinet members for attending the Committee and for their willingness to listen to us.

Cllr Robin Bennett and Cllr Charlie Hicks both stepped down at the election but their contributions to the Committee, both as Deputy Chair and as members, was profound and the Committee owes them a great debt for their dogged enthusiasm and commitment.

Thank you, too, to the Scrutiny team – particularly Richard Doney and Ben Piper – for their support to the Committee.

As I reflect over the past year of the Committee's work, I think I'm most proud of the laser eyed focus that we have given to the section 106 infrastructure funding statements. Initially, I fear there may have been a temptation to think we were stepping on officers' toes but as the project – ably encouraged by Cllr Mallon when he was chair in the last council year – has developed and come to fruition we

have seen real change. A real impact and a real difference will be made which ultimately will benefit residents right across the county. That tangible impact is something of which we should rightly be very proud.

Cllr Liam Walker, Chair of Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024/25



Cllr Liam Walker (chair)

Membership

- Cllr Liam Walker (Chair)
- Cllr Robin Bennett (Deputy Chair)
- Cllr Felix Bloomfield
- Cllr Duncan Enright
- Cllr Charlie Hicks
- Cllr Susanna Pressel
- Cllr Nigel Simpson
- Cllr Bethia Thomas

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held	Reports to cabinet	Working group reports
5	9	1
Click-throughs to agendas		2,291
Number of substantive items considered	Working group recommendations	
	20	
13	Scrutiny recommendations	
	59	
Members of public involved (public speakers)		3
Cabinet response breakdown*		
<ul style="list-style-type: none">24 accepted (40.68 per cent)6 partially accepted (10.17 per cent)0 rejected (0 per cent)29 no reply (49.15 per cent)		
*(based on responses received at time of publication)		

Key areas of focus and achievements

Section 106 Infrastructure Statement

The Infrastructure Funding Statement had initially been included on the Committee's agenda in the last municipal year to provide a level of assurance to members of the Committee. Instead, the Committee made a resolute call for action to ensure that processes were improved and that more funding was spent.

That call was heeded by the Cabinet and an improvement project was put into place.

The Committee has nonetheless been concerned at the number of barriers and constraints around expenditure of s.106 moneys. These funds are paid by developers to the Council in order for the Council to provide infrastructure needed as a result of developments. The Committee makes no apology for the amount of attention it has paid to the Council's failure to spend huge sums of money as quickly or as efficiently as it should have done. The need to remedy this is one of the things that unites members across the Chamber and united the Committee.

As a result of this, the Committee's municipal year was book-ended by s.106 funds with a request for a further item in its first meeting of the year and with a report on the Improvement Programme Update at the last of the year and of the Council term.

The Committee made eight recommendations in November, received a written update in February, and welcomed a whole suite of officers to its April meeting. The Committee was pleased at the progress made by April 2024 and adopts for itself the words from last year's annual report that the "Committee's close scrutiny of the Infrastructure Funding Statement will, it hopes, have drawn attention to issues which when remedied will be of great benefit to Oxfordshire's residents."

The second report was largely based on the recommendations arising from the first report and shows the Council recognising the value of the Committee's input. The Committee had also

identified the Local Government Association's Planning Advisory Services' self-assessment kit as something that should be undertaken and this recommendation was accepted, along with others, with the Council committing to incorporate it into the workstream within the wider programme.

The Committee had long-recommended the speedy implementation of the data dashboard which shows, by division, what s.106 contributions are available, for what, and when they will be delivered. The Committee hoped that following the May 2025 election new and returning members would find this extremely useful and, whilst it recommended a few tweaks, was delighted by its demonstration in Committee.

It will be for the successor committee to decide whether to continue to monitor the work of the s.106 improvement programme board but the outgoing committee was keen that it would and the board itself, which recently began phase 3 of its work, would hope to continue to report to the Committee.

Transport

Transport has, perhaps inevitably, also been a key theme of this past year. The Local Transport Connectivity Plan (LTCP) Monitoring Report was reviewed by the Committee before it was submitted to Cabinet. The LTCP progress report was introduced as having marked a major shift aimed at changing travel behaviours in the county. Despite difficulties in setting a relevant baseline due to COVID-19's impact on travel at that time, there were positive trends like increased cycling, bus, and rail use, along with fewer road traffic casualties. However, vehicle miles and road emissions rose slightly. The report also mentioned delays in major policy implementations. The Committee was reminded that some of the data pertained to 2022 which made monitoring a challenge.

Members raised concerns about changes in baseline measurements for car trips, noting a 4% increase in 2022 compared to 2019 and

a 2.3% decrease in 2024 compared to 2022. It emphasised the need for more detailed data and for clearer distinctions between policy adoption and infrastructure delivery. Mobility hubs were discussed as a means to reduce congestion and emissions by facilitating a switch to public transportation. The School Streets scheme showed significant reductions in car arrivals and increases in cycling among children. Despite fewer car trips, vehicle miles increased, aligning with national trends, and members highlighted the need for more qualitative data to understand these changes.

The Committee made several requests of the Director of Environment and Highways regarding presentation and detail of the report before it was submitted to Cabinet. These requests were to provide greater clarity so that monitoring was easier and the requests were largely adopted. In addition, one formal recommendation was made to Cabinet which was about changing the headline LTCP target on car use reduction. Rather than relating to car trips, the Committee was of the view that it should relate to car mileage. This would align more readily with carbon emissions.

The Council's target is to replace or remove one out of every four current car trips in Oxfordshire. However, a journey by private car to a railway station or to a Park and Ride where the motorist then switches to public transport to travel into the urban centre, for example, is preferable to that whole journey, from home to the urban centre, being undertaken by private car. Residents seeking to reduce their car use might well choose to do this with the best of intentions (and with beneficial outcomes) but are counted as equally problematic as if they had undertaken their whole journey by car. The Committee considered that there would be considerable merit in following the example of the Scottish and Welsh Governments and moving from a car trip to car mileage reduction measure.

In September 2024, the Committee established a Transport Working Group – comprising Cllr Hicks (chair), Cllr Walker (deputy chair), Cllr Bennett, and Cllr Haywood. The Working Group

was concerned that, whilst the LTCP set out the objectives for the Council, the LTCP5 Monitoring Report showed that the Council was not on track to meet those objectives. This was of concern to members who, through this Group, sought to scrutinise aspects of the Council's delivery to consider what was working well and what could be improved.

The Group conducted two deep dives, into the Oxford Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) and into the Science Vale Movement and Place Strategy. In order to ensure the Group's work was focused, it concentrated primarily on the active travel targets whilst having an awareness of wider targets. The Committee and the Group were very grateful to the large number of officers who had contributed to its work.

The Transport Working Group submitted its report to the Committee in April 2025 for its approval and onward submission to Cabinet. The Group made 20 recommendations which the Committee endorsed in their entirety. The recommendations focused on data, governance, capacity building, funding, partnerships, and public engagement. The recommendations were fundamentally about ensuring that the Council makes the changes necessary to meet its headline targets of the LTCP, including the necessary resources, monitoring, skills, capacity, and approach, to mean that its active travel plans are at the heart of its place-making priorities.

Working groups are widely held to be the forum for focused and detailed scrutiny that could otherwise dominate the agenda of a committee for multiple meetings. This Group was such an example and the Committee is proud to have established it and grateful for its work. Both the Group and the Committee more widely recognised that some of the recommendations would be slightly more challenging to achieve but considered that all of them would be of great value. Members were pleased to hear the Director of Environment and Highways comment in Committee on their usefulness.

The final Committee of the year also considered an update on the nascent rail strategy and

anticipated that a report would be submitted to the new Committee in the autumn so that the Committee contribute more tangibly to the draft strategy before it goes to Cabinet for approval. The Committee made two recommendations.

The Network Management report updated the Committee on progress on the Lane Rental Scheme. This was envisaged as something that would make a real difference to Oxfordshire residents in that utility companies would be provided with an incentive to ensure efficient utility works through financial measures which would also generate for highway maintenance. The Committee looked forward to the scheme coming to fruition.

City Centre Accommodation Strategy

The February meeting of the Committee also saw a large number of guests attending. Recognising the benefits of considering the proposal before it was submitted to Cabinet, the Committee agreed to scrutinise the plans for the disposal of County Hall. The Council had been working to reduce the number of county council buildings to reduce expenditure and to reflect contemporary working practices. In addition, the carbon inefficiency of the current estate meant that significant expenditure would be needed were County Hall to be retained.

The Committee was provided with the information in draft that was expected to be before Cabinet on 25 February 2025 when it was recommended to “agree to the freehold disposal of New and Old County Hall, on the terms set out in exempt Annex 4.”

The Committee was advised that both the disposal of County Hall and the transformation of Speedwell House provided the Council with the opportunity to use its assets, covenant and influence to be the ‘place-shaper of choice’ in Oxford city centre and to be at the heart of social regeneration. The capital receipt from the disposal of County House would be sufficient to fund the delivery of the refurbished Speedwell House complex and would also enable the wider regeneration and placemaking initiatives envisaged in and around Speedwell Street.

Given the commercial sensitivity of the content of some of the annexes, the Committee resolved to exclude the public from the remainder of the meeting and so it would be inappropriate to go into any further detail here but topics explored by the Committee included which scrutiny committee should most appropriately have considered the proposal; the assessment of alternative options; potential socio-economic benefits; redevelopment strategies for Speedwell House; market engagement and bid processes; issues related to public access and heritage conservation; planning considerations; the implications of local government reorganisation.

The Committee recommended that the Council should work to ensure that public access to both New and Old County Hall was maintained as far as possible and, also, that the Council should set out its strategy and action plan for the city centre’s redevelopment and regeneration. These recommendations were accepted. In presenting them, the Committee explained that it considered that the Council should develop and present a strategy for the city centre which would set out the Council’s place making ambitions. It should describe where, when, and what changes the Council foresees and how it seeks to achieve them. It would also include the Council’s commitment to the maintenance of public access. The Committee expected this to have an integrated land use and transport lens and to be written taking the Central Oxford Movement and Place Framework into account.

The Committee recognised that the County Council does not have sole responsibility or power for place making and that no council will have such even after local government reorganisation. It will be for the Council and its successor body to work with partners and stakeholders across the city and county to regenerate the city centre. Such a strategy would set out how this is envisaged to work. The Committee looks forward to scrutinising this in the future.

Community Safety

The Committee's first meeting of the municipal year saw the Thames Valley Police (TVP) and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable attend when the Committee sat as the Council's Crime and Disorder Panel. The Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC) gave an overview of his new police and crime plan and provided an update on a separate Road Safety strategy his office had been working on. The Chief Constable updated the committee on the operational performance and challenges faced by Thames Valley Police and the Chief Superintendent gave a brief overview of the crime trends and issues in Oxfordshire.

The Committee was keen to see collaborative efforts between both TVP and the PCC's office and the Council and its highways department. It also encouraged TVP to adopt targets that matched the then new Government's priorities for policing.

As well as police officers, the Committee had also invited the Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety to present the Community Safety Annual Report. The Chief Fire Officer presented the report on the statutory community safety agreement, which outlined the achievements and challenges of the community safety partnership in Oxfordshire in the past year. He highlighted some of the key areas of work, such as tackling domestic abuse, reducing reoffending, preventing radicalisation, and supporting vulnerable people.

The Chief Fire Officer discussed ongoing engagement with probation services as part of the partnership's efforts to reduce reoffending, especially among young people. This indicated a collaborative approach to addressing community safety concerns.

The report and discussion emphasised various programmes aimed at supporting young people, particularly those at risk of offending or reoffending. This included efforts to provide both general support and more targeted interventions for individuals, with ongoing work to ensure the right provision across Oxfordshire.

The Chief Fire Officer returned to the Committee in September 2024 to present a report on the Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service improvement plan, highlighting it as a major change and addressing both His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire & Rescue Services (HMICFRS) recommendations and broader service improvements. The Fire Improvement Board had been established and had its first meeting, with HMICFRS showing support for the approach. The recommendation was for the Committee to endorse the Fire Improvement Board as the method to track improvements and to agree that the Chief Fire Officer should report annually on progress to the Committee.

Other areas of Activity

The Local Nature Recovery Strategy captured the Committee's imagination and enthusiasm and members made 12 recommendations, all of which were accepted at least in part, and which sought to strengthen and future-proof the success of the strategy.

The Flood Event Response report was received by the Committee on 25 September 2024, when there was flooding across the county. The report was retrospective and focused on how the county's services had responded to Storm Henk and what lessons had been learned. The Committee invited a wide range of officers representing teams across the Council and was pleased to welcome representatives from Thames Water and the Environment Agency as well as a representative of South Oxfordshire District Council and the Vale of the White Horse District Council.

This provided the opportunity to raise questions about how the Environment Agency and Thames Water engage with the Council and with the city and district councils.

Whilst the Council is the Lead Local Flooding Authority, the Committee was keen to impress upon all the importance of multi-agency collaboration and made six recommendations to Cabinet which were all accepted, at least in part.

5 Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

I was privileged to be elected to chair the Education and Young People Committee for the 2024/25 municipal year and to chair it throughout this reporting cycle.

The Committee has rightly continued to scrutinise the Local Area Partnership's progress on the special educational needs and disability (SEND) Priority Action Plan and the Council's improvement journey but – whilst that is hugely important – it has also been keen to ensure that its focus has been wider than that.

Home to School Transport is an issue that affects children and young people in all divisions across the county and so, when there were plans to change the policy, the Committee was keen to consider it fully. As well as considering it on two occasions in Committee, members also met officers as part of what we called a Sprint Group to fully understand the challenges and to inform our recommendations.

The Committee was looking forward to scrutinising the draft policy after the consultation but that and the Education Otherwise Than At School Policy, which the Committee also reviewed in draft form may form part of the Committee's future work.

Amongst other important matters, we considered Youth Justice, Children's Homes, Adoption, the Virtual School, Safeguarding, and School Place Planning.

Chairing this committee involved some of the most important work I undertook during my time at County Hall and I would like to thank all members of the Committee for working with me

constructively to try and add value. I would like to pay particular tribute to Michael Waine who retired from the Council at the election after 20 years' service. His contribution to the work of this committee and its predecessor committees was invaluable and I am delighted that Council has conferred on him the honour of being an Honorary Alderman.

I would also like to thank Richard Doney and Ben Piper for their support to me as chair of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee EYP and of People before that.

The Committee's remit covers vitally important responsibilities on the Council's part and I wish members and officers well as they seek to discharge them to their best of their abilities.

CLlr Nigel Simpson, Chair of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2024/25



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)

Membership

Cllr Nigel Simpson (Chair)
 Cllr Jenny Hannaby (Deputy Chair)
 Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE
 Cllr Ian Corkin
 Cllr Trish Elphinstone
 Cllr Andy Graham
 Cllr Sally Povolotsky
 Cllr Roz Smith
 Cllr Michael Waine

Fraser Long
 – Catholic representative co-optee

Toby Long
 – Anglican representative co-optee

Hana G
 – Young Person co-optee
 (from February 2025)

Katie N
 – Young Person co-optee
 (from February 2025)

Peace Nnaji
 – Parent Governor co-optee
 (from February 2025)

Activity in brief

Number of
meetings
held

5

Reports to
cabinet

5

Working
group
reports

0

Click-throughs
to agendas

2,646

Number of
substantive
items
considered

17

Working
group
recommendations

0

Scrutiny
recommendations

7

Members of public involved
(public speakers)

14

Cabinet response breakdown*

- **2 accepted** (28.57 per cent)
- **2 partially accepted** (28.57 per cent)
- **0 rejected** (0 per cent)
- **3 no reply** (42.86 per cent)

*(based on responses received at time of publication)

Key areas of focus and achievements

Home to School Transport

Home to School Transport was considered by the Committee at its first meeting of the municipal year, in July 2024. The Committee had asked for an update on the report from the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Home to School Transport Working Group that had been presented in March 2023 and also sought information about the broader home to school transport system, including details of the spare seats scheme.

The Committee then formed a Sprint Group which met with officers to consider the Spare Seats Scheme and the topic returned to the Committee in February 2025 as part of the public consultation on the Revised Home to School Transport Policy and Post 16 Policy Statement Review. The Policies had not been consulted upon since 2014 and the consultation focused on six areas, including language updates, direct payments to parents, alternative provision, post-16 SEND transport charges, split villages, and the spare seat scheme. The dedicated Education and Young People Committee gave the Council the opportunity to have its proposals properly scrutinised and to have these matters discussed in public before they were submitted for decision-making.

The item was concluded with agreement from Members that the results of the home to school transport consultation would be brought back to the committee for further discussion and analysis. This is expected to occur during the next municipal year.

SEND

The September meeting saw officers from across the Local Area Partnership attend to answer the Committee's questions on the SEND Priority Action Plan Update. The Committee received another update on progress made across the Partnership in February 2025, when members of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee were also invited to attend. The Committee welcomed representatives of the Integrated Care Board as well as Steve Crocker, the independent chair of the SEND Improvement Advisory Board.

The Committee had called for greater transparency around the work undertaken by the SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board (SIAB) and the progress made in committee provided the opportunity for external assurance that members who are not responsible for decision-making, including co-opted members, can provide.

EOTAS

The Committee considered the draft Education Otherwise Than At School Policy (EOTAS) in November 2024. The number of children and families receiving EOTAS had increased from 42 to 52 and the annual spend at November 2024 was £2.1 million. This highlighted the need for a clear policy detailing responsibilities and processes. There had been considerable disquiet from some parents and carers in the lead up to the meeting and the Cabinet member for SEND Improvement acknowledged that and explained it was the intention to engage more with parents and carers before the policy was subsequently submitted to Cabinet.

The Committee made two recommendations to Cabinet, one being that the Council should develop an Alternative Provision policy and the other being that the draft EOTAS policy should be redeveloped using co-production and that this should be done swiftly. No-one appeared to be content with the current proposal – whether Cabinet member, officer, Committee member, or member of the public – and the Committee was keen to encourage the Council to revise its draft significantly.

Subsequently, it was agreed that the development of the policy in a co-produced way was taking more time than initially anticipated but that the work was fruitful and that, rather than creating arbitrary deadlines, it was preferable for that work to take its course. It would, therefore, return to the Committee after the close of this reporting period.

Whilst this meant that the adoption of the policy was to be delayed, the early engagement with the Committee will – it is hoped – lead to improved outcomes and a policy with which members, officers, and the public are content.

Annual Reports

As well as the 'big ticket' items, the Committee also has an important role in providing assurance to both the Council and to the public that particular areas of work which would not otherwise gain public attention have been considered in a public, democratic forum.

The Youth Justice Annual Plan was reported to the Committee in September with the plan covering both strategic and operational delivery arrangements. The strategic priorities for the partnership were: reducing our First Time Entrants (FTE) rate; tackling exploitation of children in Oxfordshire; tackling serious youth violence in Oxfordshire; improving outcomes for children with Special Educational Needs & Disabilities (SEND) in the criminal justice system in Oxfordshire.

There was discussion around the importance of collaborating with partners, including local authorities, police, health services, probation, schools, community groups, and district councils to tackle youth justice issues holistically. The Committee was pleased to hear that robust mental health support had been a strength of the partnership's approach to youth justice.

The Committee considered the Annual Children's Safeguarding Report and welcomed the Independent Chair of the Board to present the report on the Oxfordshire Children's Safeguarding Board over the past year.

The Committee considered the Annual Report on Holiday Activities and Food Programme. This national grant-funded initiative supported children eligible for free school meals during holidays. The Committee commended the collaboration and information-sharing which sought to maximise the take up. Councillors were encouraged to promote the programme in their communities, too, to boost both awareness and participation.

The Committee received the Annual Report from Adopt Thames Valley. The agency manages recruitment, assessment, approval of adopters, non-agency adoptions, family finding, and post-adoption support. The agency also aids special guardianship families, indirect letterbox contact, birth relatives, and adopted adults seeking records.

The final meeting of the reporting cycle, in March 2025, saw the Committee consider an update on the opening of children's homes. The Committee noted that a place in a Council owned children's home cost around £4.5k per child per week whilst, in the private sector, costs often exceeded £7k and sometimes reached £18k per week. The Committee was keen to emphasise that the focus should remain on providing quality care rather than solely financial considerations. It made one recommendation to Cabinet, about encouraging Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible helping to expedite the process of placing children in registered settings.

The Committee considered the annual report on the Virtual School and also requested an update on the extended responsibilities laid on the Virtual School as well as ones that were anticipated to come into force under new legislation. Members heard the school's core duty described as being to promote education for children in care and care leavers, and extended duties for previously cared-for children, children with a social worker, and children in kinship care. Achievements included reducing school move times, improving educational outcomes, and increasing university attendance and graduation rates among care leavers.

The Committee made two recommendations in response to this report, the first being that the Council should highlight the work of the school and the second being that there should be more detail presented about exclusions in the annual report, including identifying where there have been informal exclusions.

The last item of the Council year was a report on School Place Planning and Delivery, which highlighted the challenges posed by falling birth rates and the impact of significant house building in Oxfordshire. Concerns were expressed about the capital expenditure required for new schools and the potential risks to funding for school replacements. The Committee emphasised the need to engage planning authorities and how developer funding could be used for schools.

6 People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

Adult social care is a service that receives adverse headlines across the country and in Oxfordshire we are justifiably proud that we are not in that position. The services provided to our residents are not full of the scare stories that pervade the popular consciousness but are often good news stories.

That doesn't necessarily mean though that we always get it right as a council and, with adult social care accounting for approximately 40% percent of the Council's revenue budget each year, it is imperative that we keep a close eye on and scrutinise in detail all aspects of the service.

I hadn't been involved in the scrutiny of adult social care for some years when I was elected to chair this committee and getting up to speed was a learning curve for me. I'm grateful to the officer corps for the education and training and induction they provided.

I would also like to express my thanks to Cllr Imade Edosomwan for his work and support as Deputy Chair and to all members of last year's Committee, particularly those who did not return to County Hall this time. I hope that the work we contributed continues to bear fruit and I wish the new members of the Committee well.

Last year, I noted my pleasure that the Place Committee had retained the same Scrutiny Officer throughout the year. That has also been the case for this Committee and I would like to thank Richard Doney and Ben Piper for their superlative work in supporting me specifically and the Committee more generally. Thank you!

Cllr Kieron Mallon, Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 2024/25



Cllr Kieron Mallon (chair)

Membership

Cllr Kieron Mallon (Chair)
 Cllr Imade Edosomwan (Deputy Chair)
 Cllr Kevin Bulmer
 Cllr Trish Elphinstone
 Cllr Andy Graham
 Cllr Jenny Hannaby
 Cllr Nick Leverton
 Cllr Alison Rooke
 Cllr Michael Waine

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held	Reports to cabinet	Working group reports
4	1	0
Click-throughs to agendas		1,672
Number of substantive items considered	Working group recommendations	
	0	
4	Scrutiny recommendations	
	4	
Members of public involved (public speakers)		0
Cabinet response breakdown*		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 0 accepted (0 per cent) • 0 partially accepted (0 per cent) • 0 rejected (0 per cent) • 4 no reply (100 per cent) 		
*(based on responses received at time of publication)		

Key areas of focus and achievements

Committee work

The People Committee received the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Safeguarding Board's (OSAB) annual report. The presentation was led by the Independent Chair, who stressed that safeguarding was a collective responsibility, regardless of any staff shortages and budget limitations. A decrease in safeguarding enquiries was also observed. The importance of quicker and more effective learning from reviews to prevent future incidents was highlighted, pointing out recurring issues such as insufficient professional curiosity and poor multi-agency risk assessment. The Independent Chair identified three key priorities for OSAB, derived from over 200 recommendations: understanding barriers to learning, embedding acquired knowledge, and monitoring effectiveness.

The Committee explored what strategies were in place to ensure that adequate time was provided to individuals at risk and sought assurance that care was sufficiently tailored to individuals; established that the team was conducting an in-depth review of concerns raised in 2022/23 and 2023/24 to assess similarities or differences between the years, and to determine whether the issues were resolved or continued. Members further explored the interplay between the Multi-Agency Risk Assessment (MARM) process – one intended for individuals who may not have had traditional care and support needs but still presented recurring risks – and the Multi-Agency Safeguarding Hub (MASH) which was a central, coordinating hub where all referrals for adults and children (including those from the police) were received.

The Committee also discussed whistleblowing and the importance of safeguarding being everyone's business.

Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards (DOLS) were created to protect people in care homes or hospitals who could not consent to their care with a 2014 Supreme Court ruling expanding the definition and increasing those under DOLS. The service required a complex assessment process, needing both a doctor and a qualified social worker or occupational therapist. The Committee established that the completion rate for DOLS assessments was at that point below the national standard but was pleased to hear that efforts were being made to improve that through additional staffing and external agency support. Efforts to boost efficiency included using shorter documents, which still complied with the legal requirements, to raise the number of completed assessments.

One of the dominant themes for Adult Social Care has been preparedness for the Care Quality Commission's Assurance visit. Its visit, in January 2025, was the CQC's first visit since 2010. The Committee was keen to understand the Council's readiness and received a report in December 2024 which focused on the improvement plan put in place after the LGA's Peer Review in March 2024 and which had been reported to the Committee in April 2024.

The improvement plan included embedding the Oxfordshire Way, enhancing co-production, improving data and transforming pathways. Progress had been made in reducing assessment wait times, safeguarding enquiry delays, Deprivation of Liberty Safeguards backlog, and improving relationships with care homes. Efforts continued to amplify the voice of individuals and to enhance use of plain language.

The Committee's discussions with the Cabinet member and the officers highlighted the importance of collaboration, continuous improvement, and effective communication in delivering high-quality adult social care services. Members encouraged maintaining strong joint working arrangements, enhancing co-production efforts, and ensuring timely assessments and care delivery.

The final meeting of the municipal year, and of the Council term, saw the Committee receive a report on co-production in Adult Social Care. The Committee was pleased to welcome officers from a range of roles to hear different perspectives. The Committee was aware that co-production had been an important topic for discussion both at Council and more widely.

This report provided an overview of co-production and its progress since the Peer Challenge had identified its green shoots of success. The Director set out that the Oxfordshire definition of co-production is:

‘...the process where providers and/or professionals and stakeholding citizens equally share a whole-life responsibility for the creation and delivery of products, services or knowledge. Co-production is underpinned by the principles of equality, diversity, access and reciprocity.’

This was not a definition unique to Adult Social Care but was one used across the Council and it was explained that co-production is intended to be a collaborative process where public services and people work together in the design, delivery, and evaluation of public services.

Topics explored included clarity of language and the need for plain English; different needs of different demographic and geographic groups and the resultant need for differentiation of approach; clear and timely communication; resources for embedding co-production across the Council; how the Council monitored the success of co-production; the Co-Production Advisory Board and its membership; co-production training; relationships with the NHS and other system partners.

The Committee was keen to encourage and enable the Council to further embed the principles and practices relating to co-production which services have been seeking to deliver over recent years. Members and residents, as well as officers, have been keen to see the ‘green shoots’ the LGA identified grow and thrive. The Committee therefore made four recommendations to Cabinet: one was about officer training and one about member training; the third was about members sitting on the Co-Production Advisory Board to offer a different perspective and insight. The fourth tied the three together into a single, overarching recommendation about the Council committing itself to systemic and whole-hearted co-production across Children’s Services and Adult Social Care.

7 Other Areas of Work

Briefings

It is common for Scrutiny Committee members to be briefed by officers on areas of particular interest or relevance. Although briefings are designed to equip Scrutiny members to undertake their role, the briefings can also be of wider relevance. Over the reporting period Scrutiny has hosted Scrutiny briefings on:

- Education outcomes data

8 Reflections and Future Ambitions

One of the first decisions made by the Council in the previous electoral cycle was to refresh and expand the Scrutiny function in July 2021. It is timely, therefore, to reflect on its journey and the impact of that decision.

The most significant change has been in committee capacity, with the total number of Scrutiny Committees (excluding Health Scrutiny), since the 2020/21 Council Year, increasing from two to five, and the number of meetings from 20 to 25. Whilst the number of substantive items fell from 75 to 70 in this period 2024/2025, the greater capacity of the Scrutiny function has enabled greater time to be devoted to each item.

The fruits of this greater capacity are seen in the huge increase in communication of ideas between Cabinet and Scrutiny, with 71 recommendations being made to Cabinet in the last year, where there were none made in 2020/21. Even recognising that not all recommendations are accepted, Scrutiny's input and influence on shaping the Council's policy and delivery has grown over this period.

As referenced elsewhere, however, the impact of Scrutiny is hard to measure by numbers alone. The following are some of the comments made by members who have been part of Scrutiny's development over the past four years:

"Scrutiny is 'one of the most enjoyable areas of council... It provides you with the opportunity to scrutinise and challenge the administration in a non-political manner. It also gives you the most in-depth and up-to-date information regarding council business."

[Previously] "we weren't giving a suitable voice for the rest of the council to scrutinise papers coming through... We now have a number of committees performing that very important function... It has raised some very valid points and there have been things raised at Scrutiny before going to cabinet, and have been altered before being put in front of cabinet ... That's a really positive improvement"

I now feel ... that we are 'getting' scrutiny and starting to deliver

Election

The local election results of May 2025 pose both an opportunity for Scrutiny, and a challenge. The level of turnover, with fewer than half of councillors prior to the election returning, is perhaps the most significant. The Scrutiny function has lost many long-serving and experienced members with deep understandings of relevant fields. It will be important to support new members to develop this experience, understanding and effectiveness whilst not quashing their enthusiasm or new ideas and perspectives.

Public Engagement

In 2023/24, Scrutiny implemented a monitoring system to track its interactions with public speakers and their experience of engaging with the Scrutiny function. An analysis of the feedback collected from the 2024/25 municipal year highlights the following:

- A high satisfaction level, with an average rating of 4.2 out of 5 for public speakers' experiences. This reflects the team's success in balancing rigorous member scrutiny with a positive and accessible approach to the public.
- An improved perception of the Council overall following its engagement with scrutiny, scoring 3.2 out of 5, with 5 meaning significant improvement. Increased public participation has been instrumental in fostering transparency and trust.
- Praise for the team's friendly, welcoming, and approachable nature, emphasising the value of their willingness to engage with public speakers before meetings. Such proactive communication has created an inclusive and supportive environment, in which speakers report feeling confident and respected.

By prioritising engagement and approachability, the scrutiny team has strengthened its reputation as a vital part of the council's work and set a high standard for public-facing governance. These efforts have not only improved perceptions but also reinforced the importance of scrutiny in fostering civic engagement and accountability.

A further aspect of public engagement within the Scrutiny function this year has been the appointment of co-opted members. These are members of the public with specific knowledge or lived experience who become members of a committee without having been elected.

The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee relies most heavily on co-opted members. Nationally, one of the groups of co-opted members education committees must take representatives from, parent governors of maintained schools, are extremely difficult to recruit to and Oxfordshire has not managed to fill these posts over the last decade. In the last year, however, one of the two vacancies has been filled, which is a significant achievement.

Whilst parent governors and representatives of Catholic and Church of England education providers are required to be given seats on education scrutiny committees by law, the Council has gone further. On the basis of its commitment to future generations and the good practice embodied by the phrase 'no talking about me without me' the Council has become the first County Council in the country to recruit young people as co-opted members to the committee. This has allowed young people's perspectives to be voiced directly in the committee setting as full – albeit non-voting – members. Support for these young people has, this year, been provided internally by the Council, but over the coming year this is expected to transition to an external provider to ensure and be seen to ensure greater independence of the young people.

Corporate Culture

The same point has been made consistently across previous annual reports, and in view of its importance is repeated here: Scrutiny is a collective endeavour. As highlighted by the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities in its statutory guidance on Scrutiny, 'The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.' The health of Overview and Scrutiny, and the positive development of Scrutiny across the previous administration is a corporate success and an indication that the culture, behaviours and attitudes prevailing in the Council are positive.

Over the course of the last year Scrutiny has worked to further this cultural integration, focusing on:

- Improving the Council's compliance in responding to Scrutiny recommendations within statutory timeframes. Over the past year, the average time for Cabinet to respond to Scrutiny recommendations has fallen from almost 90 days (89.7) to a little over 60 (62.1). This will continue to be a focus to seek that all recommendations are responded to according to statutory requirements.
- Improving governance and decision-making processes. The Council's governance has been a large area of focus corporately, including significant work by officers to clarify internal processes, as well as significant member work in reviewing and negotiating updates to the Council's constitution. Scrutiny seeks to remain involved in the Council's ongoing work to improve these areas of its activity to ensure it is part of the Council's decision-making process and not an add-on to it.
- Staff awareness and skills. The Scrutiny function has invested significant time in designing or updating and delivering training to staff on different areas of governance. These include (in partnership with Policy colleagues) the Council's mandatory training for managers on 'Working in a Political Environment', Introductions to the Role of Scrutiny and Cabinet for different directorate leadership teams, Report-Writing training, and even a 'mock-Scrutiny' session for the Council's Oxfordshire Younger Generation (OxYGen) network to allow members of staff without experience of Scrutiny to gain it in a less intimidating environment than a public meeting. The success and positive feedback from these sessions, as well as the Council's intention to continue its improvements to governance, mean it is expected that this too will continue to be an area of focus for the coming year.

It is worth highlighting that one reason Scrutiny has been able to make its improvements and contributions to the Council's wider processes has been through undertaking its work more efficiently. Scrutiny has been using the Council's AI tool, Co-pilot. This has leveraged capacity within the team, particularly reducing the time taken to write minutes of meetings, but also being used to support initial drafts of a number of paragraphs to this annual report.

9 Thanks

Taking the slightly longer view of Scrutiny's development over the previous electoral cycle there are many people to thank. A significant majority of elected members were involved in Scrutiny over this period, either as committee members or substitutes, or attending as Cabinet members.

Deep thanks go to all councillors contributing to the Scrutiny function, but particularly to the 2024/25 Chairs and Deputy Chairs, including former Councillors Eddie Reeves and Bob Johnstone of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Nigel Simpson of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny, and Robin Bennett of Place Overview and Scrutiny.

Particular thanks from this year is given to Peace Nnaji, Hana G, Katie N, Fraser Long, and Toby Long for their willingness to give up their time and share their expertise as co-opted members of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Finally, deep gratitude is expressed to the officers of the Council who have participated in the Scrutiny process. From the efforts of writing reports to having the Council's work publicly challenged and implementing recommendations, Scrutiny requires significant time and effort. The willingness and commitment to do that hard work to improve outcomes for residents is commendable.

10 Contacting Scrutiny

If you would like to contact scrutiny with suggestions, ideas or comments please email scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk.

Meetings of its committees are open to the public and are livestreamed, the link to which can be found on the relevant meeting agenda which can be accessed from this page:

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ieDocHome.aspx?bcr=1>

We also welcome members of the public sharing their views on relevant items on the agenda in person or via Teams.

Should you wish to know what is coming to a particular committee you can register for updates via:

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/ielogon.aspx?lp=1&RPID=1954675&HPID=1954675&Forms=1&META=mgSubscribeLogon>



Tom Hudson,
Scrutiny Manager

Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Richard Doney,
Scrutiny Officer

- Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Omid Nouri,
Scrutiny Officer (Health)

- Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)
- Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (BOB HOSC)



Ben Piper,
Democratic Services Officer

- To cover People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for 2025/26

Divisions affected – All

COUNCIL

8 JULY 2025

COUNCILLOR PARENTAL LEAVE POLICY

Report of the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. Council is RECOMMENDED to approve a parental leave policy for councillors, ensuring support for new parents and best practice in local governance. The policy includes provisions for temporary cover and reflects the council's commitment to promoting equality and diversity among elected officials.

Background

2. Many councils across England have adopted the Local Government Association's (LGA) model policy or amended versions of it. The Policy attached at Appendix A is based on the LGA model policy.
3. Whilst currently, there is no legal right to parental leave of any kind for elected members, this policy is considered best practice, and will contribute towards enhancing the diversity of experience, age, and background among local authority councillors. Furthermore, it will assist in retaining experienced councillors and making public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it.
4. This policy outlines councillors' entitlements to Parental Leave, which includes maternity, paternity, shared parental, and adoption leave.
5. The aim of this policy is to ensure that, as far as possible, elected members (Members) are able to take suitable leave during the time of birth or adoption. It also aims to enable both parents to take leave and to ensure that reasonable and adequate arrangements are in place to provide cover for portfolio-holders during any period of leave taken.
6. Key highlights of the policy include:
 - a. No existing legal right to parental leave for councillors, but this policy aims to increase and retain diversity and accessibility within the council.
 - b. Maternity Leave: Up to 6 months leave from the due date, extendable to 52 weeks by agreement. Additional leave for premature births is also provided.

- c. Paternity Leave: A minimum of 2 weeks for members who are biological fathers or nominated carers following the birth of their child.
- d. Where both parents are Members each can take shared parental leave up to 50 weeks, with special arrangements in cases of prematurity.
- e. Members adopting a child are entitled to up to 52 weeks of adoption leave from the date of placement
- f. Recognition of a right to Parental Bereavement Leave.

Special Responsibility Allowances

- 7. The policy proposes that Members entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) shall continue to receive their allowance in full in the case of maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave. The newly appointed Independent Remuneration Panel (IRP) will be requested to confirm their agreement to this aspect of the Policy proposal at their first meeting. This will be confirmed at Council in September 2025.

Legal implications

- 8. There is no legal requirement for the Council to adopt a Parental Leave Policy. However, the introduction of such a policy would help the Council advance equality of opportunity for protected groups. The LGA has taken legal advice on their model policy.
- 9. Any Member who takes maternity, shared parental or adoption leave has a legal duty under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 to attend a meeting of the Council within a six-month period. The Council meeting can agree to an extended leave of absence prior to the expiration of that six-month period. This would require the Monitoring Officer to prepare a report to Council seeking an extension of leave.
- 10. Members may either resume their meeting responsibilities prior to expiration of 6 months or give the relevant notice to the Monitoring Officer enabling a report to be taken to Council extending the leave prior to the expiry of the 6-month period.

Comments checked by: Kim Sawyer
Interim Head of Legal & Governance

Financial implications

- 11. There are no direct financial implications arising from the implementation of the policy as advised by this report. However, subject to the approval of the newly

appointed Independent Remuneration Panel, there will be costs associated with the parental leave policy should the councillor be in receipt of a Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA) and take time off for parental leave, and a decision is taken to award a second Special Responsibility Allowance (SRA).

Comments checked by: Drew Hodgson
Strategic Finance Business Partner
Drew.Hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

12. There are no direct staff implications arising from this report. Whilst the leave entitlements mirror those set out for council employees, this policy only applies to elected members.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

13. This policy will contribute towards enhancing the diversity of experience, age, and background among local authority councillors. Furthermore, it will assist in retaining experienced councillors and making public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it.

Sustainability Implications

14. There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this report.

Risk Management

15. There are no direct risk management implications arising from this report. However, the implementation of a Councillor Parental Leave Policy would remove barriers that may prevent prospective councillors from standing for public office.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Contact officer: Sarah Smith, Senior Governance Lead
governance@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Annex A: Councillor Parental Leave Policy

July 2025

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Councillor Parental Leave Policy

Introduction

- 1 This policy sets out councillors' entitlements to Parental Leave (covering maternity, paternity, shared parental, parental bereavement and adoption leave) and relevant allowances.
- 2 The objective of the policy is to ensure that insofar as possible Elected Members (Members) are able to take appropriate leave at the time of birth or adoption, that both parents are able to take leave, and that reasonable and adequate arrangements are in place to provide cover for portfolio-holders and others in receipt of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA) during any period of leave taken.
- 3 There is at present no legal right to parental leave of any kind for members. However, this policy will contribute towards increasing and retaining the diversity of experience, age and background of local authority councillors. It will also assist with retaining experienced councillors and making public office more accessible to individuals who might otherwise feel excluded from it.

Leave Periods

Maternity Leave

- 4 Members giving birth are entitled to up to 6 months maternity leave from the due date, with the option to extend up to 52 weeks by agreement if required.
- 5 In addition, where the birth is premature, the Member is entitled to take leave during the period between the date of the birth and the due date in addition to the 6 months' period. In such cases any leave taken to cover prematurity of 28 days or less shall be deducted from any extension beyond the initial 6 months.
- 6 In exceptional circumstances, and only in cases of prematurity of 29 days or more, additional leave may be taken by agreement, and such exceptional leave shall not be deducted from the total 52-week entitlement.

Paternity Leave

- 7 Members shall be entitled to take a minimum of 2 weeks paternity leave if they are the biological father or nominated carer of their partner/spouse following the birth of their child(ren).

Shared Parental Leave

- 8 A Member who has made Shared Parental Leave arrangements through their

employment is requested to advise the Council of these at the earliest possible opportunity. Every effort will be made to replicate such arrangements in terms of leave from Council.

- 9 Where both parents are Members leave may be shared up to a maximum of 24 weeks for the first six months and 26 weeks for any leave agreed thereafter, up to a maximum of 50 weeks. Special and exceptional arrangements may be made in cases of prematurity.

Adoption Leave

- 10 A Member who adopts a child through an approved adoption agency shall be entitled to take up to six months' adoption leave from the date of placement, with the option to extend up to 52 weeks by agreement if required.

Parental Bereavement Leave

- 11 Members who suffer a stillbirth after 24 weeks of pregnancy will still be entitled to up to 52 weeks maternity leave, as will a member who loses a child after it is born.
- 12 Member(s) with parental responsibility will be entitled to two weeks leave. The two weeks leave can be taken either in one block of two weeks, or as two separate blocks of one week each. The leave must be taken within 56 weeks of the date of the miscarriage or stillbirth. This is to allow for time to be taken off for difficult events such as birthdays or anniversaries.
- 13 In the event that a Member loses more than one child, they will be entitled to take a separate period of leave for each child.
- 14 Support is available to Members via the Council's Employee Assistance Programme (EAP);
 - <https://intranet.oxfordshire.gov.uk/cms/content/employee-assistance-programme>
 - Vita Wellbeing Telephone: 0800 111 6387
 - Email Helpline: Wellness@vhq.co.uk

Leave Arrangements

- 15 Any Member who takes maternity, shared parental or adoption leave retains their legal duty under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972 to attend a meeting of the Council within a six-month period unless the Council meeting agrees to an extended leave of absence prior to the expiration of that six-month period.
- 16 Any Member intending to take maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave will be responsible for ensuring that they comply with the relevant notice requirements of the Council, both in terms of the point at which the leave starts and the point at which they return.
- 17 Any member taking leave should ensure that they respond to reasonable requests

for information as promptly as possible, and that they keep officers and colleagues informed and updated in relation to intended dates of return and requests for extension of leave.

Basic Allowance

- 18 Any member wishing to take a period of maternity, paternity, adoption or parental leave will continue to receive the basic allowance. For a period of non-attendance at qualifying meetings to extend beyond six months Council would first need to grant a special dispensation under Section 85 of the Local Government Act 1972.

Special Responsibility Allowances

- 19 Members entitled to a Special Responsibility Allowance shall continue to receive their allowance in full in the case of maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave.
- 20 Where a replacement is appointed to cover the period of absence that person shall receive Special Responsibility Allowances on a pro rata basis for the period of the temporary appointment.
- 21 The payment of Special Responsibility Allowances (SRA), whether to the primary SRA holder or a replacement, during a period of maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave shall continue for a period of six months, or until the date of the next Annual Meeting of the Council, or until the date when the member taking leave is up for election (whichever is soonest). At such a point, the position will be reviewed and will be subject to a possible extension for a further six-month period.
- 22 Should a Member appointed to replace the member on maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave already hold a remunerated position, the ordinary rules relating to payment of more than one Special Responsibility Allowances shall apply.
- 23 Unless the Member taking leave is removed from their post at an Annual Meeting of the Council whilst on leave, or unless the Party to which they belong (if any) loses control of the Council during their leave period, they shall return at the end of their leave period to the same post, or to an alternative post with equivalent status and remuneration which they held before the leave began.

Resigning from Office and Elections

- 24 If a Member decides not to return at the end of their maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave they must notify the Council at the earliest possible opportunity. All allowances will cease from the effective resignation date.
- 25 If an election is held during the Member's maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave and they are not re-elected, or decide not to stand for re-election, their basic allowance and SRA if appropriate will cease from the Monday after the election date when they would technically leave office (subject to any change of

day relating to Bank Holidays).

Notification Requirements

- 26 A Member intending to take parental leave must in the first instance inform their group leader (if applicable) and the Monitoring Officer in writing. Members are asked to provide notice of their intention to take parental leave in accordance with the timescales set out below:
- a) Pregnant Members should give notice by no later than 28 days before they want to commence their maternity leave. Confirmation of the pregnancy and the expected week of childbirth is usually via a MAT B1 certificate (a form given to a woman by their doctor or midwife after the 20th week of pregnancy and shows the expected date of childbirth). As soon as practicable after the birth they should notify the same of the baby's date of birth in writing.
 - b) A Member, who is a primary adopter, should give notice within 7 days of being told they have been matched with a child and provide confirmation of the adoption through the provision of a matching certificate, and the date the child is to be placed with the Member.
 - c) For paternity leave a Member should give notice by the 15th week before the Expected week of childbirth.
 - d) A Member who is intending to take shared parental leave must advise of their intention at least 8 weeks before.
- 27 Any Member taking leave for more than a 2-month period must meet with the Monitoring Officer and Group Leader (if applicable) to discuss practical issues including how to keep in touch and about expected dates of return.
- 28 The Monitoring Officer will ensure that business support and payroll are informed of arrangements to ensure that allowances are paid in accordance with the Policy.
- 29 Any requests for special or exceptional circumstances, or extensions in line with the policy will be agreed by the Monitoring Officer in consultation with the Leader of the Council, and the group leader (if applicable).
- 30 It will be the responsibility of the group leader to allocate another Member to undertake a 'caretaking' role for the relevant division, in consultation with the Monitoring Officer. The 'caretaking' role will be allocated to a neighbouring divisional Member as far as possible. If a Member is independent and not part of a group, the Monitoring Officer will liaise with that member and any other independent Members as to who is best placed to take on the "caretaking" role.
- 31 Appointments to cover areas of special responsibility whilst a Member is on parental leave will be made in accordance with the relevant procedures for appointments.
- 32 Notice of a Member taking leave will be recorded as an apology in the minutes of a council meeting with (parental leave) added after their name if requested by the

relevant member.

Policy Review

33 The Monitoring Officer will review and amend (at least every two years) this policy as appropriate to ensure that it remains compliant with legislation and meets the needs of the council.

Responsible Officer:	Monitoring Officer
Date:	June 2025
Review Date:	June 2027

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Division(s): N/A

COUNCIL – 8 July 2025

PRESENTATION OF SCROLL TO HONORARY ALDERMAN

Report by the Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

Council is RECOMMENDED to note

- a) the conferral of the title of Honorary Alderman, under section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972, on Mr Bob Johnston at the Extraordinary Meeting on 20 May 2025 in recognition of his significant contribution to the Council in particular and public service in general;
- b) that Alderman Johnston was unable to attend the conferral meeting due to holidays; and
- c) that Council agreed to defer the presentation of the scroll until its next meeting on 8 July 2025 so that Members would have the opportunity to pay tribute.

Background

- 1. Section 249(1) of the Local Government Act 1972 allows a Council to confer the title of Honorary Alderman on former Councillors who have, in the opinion of the Council, rendered eminent service to the Council as past members of that Council.
- 2. The appointment of Honorary Alderman is to confer recognition on Members who, over a period of time, made a significant contribution to the Council in particular and public service in general. This is a lifetime award.

Criteria for Appointment

- 3. The criteria for nomination have been agreed as set out below. The person nominated:
 - (a) Has made a significant contribution in public life;
 - (b) Has given notable service on behalf of the Council, which has enhanced the reputation of Councillors and the Council itself;

- (c) Has rendered a minimum of 12 years service as a Member; and,
- (d) Is no longer politically active.

The nominee

4. **Bob Johnston** was first elected in 1993 and returned successfully three times but was unsuccessful in 2009. He was re-elected in 2013 and held the seat until this year – a total of 28 years as councillor.
5. His service included periods on the following committees since 2017:
 - Planning and Regulation Committee: May 2017 - May 2021
 - Minerals and Waste Cabinet Advisory Group : May 2017
 - Transport Advisory Panel: May 2017
 - Pension Fund Committee (Chair): June 2021 – June 2024.
 - Performance & Corporate Services & Scrutiny Committee: June 2022 - present.
6. Alderman Johnston was unable to attend the Extraordinary Council meeting on 20 May 2025 due to holidays. Council agreed to defer the presentation of the scroll to the meeting on 8 July 2025 so that Members would have an opportunity to pay tribute.

Certificate

7. The certificate of appointment will have the County Council's Coat of Arms at the top, and will be sealed with the Common Seal of the Council of Oxfordshire, witnessed by the Chair and Chief Executive.
8. The certificate of appointment is normally presented to each Honorary Alderman on the day, rolled as is the fashion for conferring degrees, and the Council will, of course, arrange for the certificates to be framed in due course.

ANITA BRADLEY

Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Background Papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Colm Ó Caomhánaigh, Democratic Services Manager
colm.ocaomhanaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

June 2025