

Divisions Affected – All

CABINET

18 November 2025

Business Management and Monitoring Report Report of Performance and Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

RECOMMENDATION

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

REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

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

INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered a report on the Council's Business Management and Monitoring (BMMR), with a specific focus on the Children, Education and Families (CEF) service area, at its meeting on 12 September 2025.
4. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, and Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, for attending the meeting and responding to questions.

SUMMARY

5. The Head of Corporate Finance presented the BMMR, noting a near break-even position for children's services but a significant overspend on the high needs Dedicated Schools Grant, threatening the Council's financial resilience. The Director of Children's Services reported that, despite rising demand and statutory requirements, the service had reduced overspends, invested in early help and youth support, and was preparing to expand further to address legislative changes and increased needs, especially in special educational needs and disabilities.
6. Following the introduction, the Committee began its questioning. Its questioning focused exclusively on aspects relating to CEF, including demand trends for Education, Health and Care Plans, the exposure of Oxfordshire schools to problems associated with reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete, the performance and approach of the Council's support for young people needing substance misuse treatments, and plans for new youth services,
7. The Committee makes one recommendation, which arises from its discussion of youth services.

RECOMMENDATIONS

8. A welcome piece of news shared with the committee was that the Council had applied for and been accepted by the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) as one of twelve local authorities to participate in a Local Youth Transformation Pilot. The pilot carries with it funding of between £250k and £750k to identify the best mechanisms and models to reverse sustainably the retreat of local youth services over the past decade or so.¹ One of the required outputs of the funding is to develop an action plan or, referred to here in the Council as the Youth Strategy. The aim of this is to prioritise specific areas of need from the Council's assessments of provision and set out how the local authority intends to improve against these areas.
9. The Committee welcomes DCMS's insistence that action plans be evidence-led; it is expected as part of the funding that the Council will map provision (including provision by third sector organisations and employers), carry out interviews with stakeholders and young people, and analyse the data. It seeks through this recommendation to highlight an important line of enquiry when assessing this data.
10. The concern of the committee lies in the tension between the DCMS's twin concerns: that the allocation of services is needs based, whilst also at the same time being sustainable. From the Council's perspective, it is clearly both cheaper and carries lower risk to invest in developing the capacity of existing services than to establish services from scratch. However, the distribution of youth services – Council and non-Council - does not necessarily correlate

¹ Since Committee, it has been confirmed that the Council has been awarded towards the higher end of funding available: £634k.

geographically with where need for youth services is at its greatest. If the Council were to focus too heavily on the 'safe' and efficient path of developing existing services, it threatens to overlook the most acute areas of need and exacerbate existing inequitable access to services. Whilst it appreciates that this approach is riskier and more difficult, the Committee is of the view that, in the event of tension between the two, the Council should adopt a needs-based approach rather than an asset-based approach to youthwork transformation.

Recommendation 1: That in its forthcoming Youth Strategy the Cabinet should ensure a more equitable distribution of voluntary sector youth services, particularly making sure that funding is allocated based on need rather than simply supporting existing services.

FURTHER CONSIDERATION

11. The Committee expects to continue its ongoing oversight of the Council's BMRR report, following up on its questions about substance misuse with a focus on Public Health performance at its December meeting.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

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

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Annex:	Pro-forma Response Template
Background papers:	None
Other Documents:	None
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