

County Council

10 December 2024

Agenda



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

To: **Members of the County COUNCIL**

Notice of a Meeting of the County Council

Tuesday, 10 December 2024 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 grey ink that reads "Reeves".

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

November 2024

Committee Officer:

Colm Ó Caomhánaigh

Tel: 07393 001096; E-Mail:

colm.oconomhanaigh@oxfordshire.gov.uk

AGENDA

1. Minutes (Pages 1 - 14)

To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 November 2024 (**CC1**) 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 15 - 16)

To make any changes to the membership of scrutiny and other committees on the nomination of political groups and to note any changes to the Cabinet made by the Leader of the Council.

Council is requested to note the formation of a Cabinet Committee.

At the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2024, the Cabinet agreed to the following arrangements for the exercise of executive functions:

The establishment of a Cabinet Committee to be known as the Shareholder Committee. The committee will operate under [Constitution Part 4.3 Cabinet Committees](#). As agreed by Cabinet, the Membership of the Shareholder Committee shall be all members of the Cabinet, and the agreed Terms of Reference are attached.

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 one working day before the meeting i.e., 9am on Monday 9 December 2024. 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

8. Questions with Notice from Members of the Council

9. Report of the Cabinet (Pages 17 - 22)

Report from Leader of the Council.

The report summarises the decisions from the Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2024.

10. Treasury Management Mid Term Review 2024/25 (Pages 23 - 34)

Report by the Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

In this report, the performance for the first half of the year (1 April to 30 September 2024) is measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2024.

Council is RECOMMENDED to note the Council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2024/25.

11. Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24 (Pages 35 - 66)

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

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

The Council is RECOMMENDED to

- a) Receive the Scrutiny Annual Report.**

12. Appraisal Process for the Chief Executive (Head of Paid Service) (Pages 67 - 92)

Report of the Director of HR and Cultural Change

The recommendations in this report are those which were endorsed by the Remuneration Committee for Council approval.

The Council is RECOMMENDED to:

- a) Approve the proposed changes to the appraisal process for the Chief Executive (Head of the Paid Service) as set out by the South East Employers (SEE) review report (Annex 2).**
- b) Delegate authority to the Remuneration Committee to constitute the Appraisal Panel and undertake the appraisals for the Chief Executive.**

- c) **Approve amendments to the Constitution to include acting as an Appraisal Panel and undertaking Chief Executive's appraisals to the terms of reference to Remuneration Committee at Part 5.1C and to delegate to the Director of Law and Governance and the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution.**

13. Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations (Pages 93 - 98)

Report by Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

To approve amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations.

Council is RECOMMENDED to

- a) **Approve the amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations, as recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee.**

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

14. Motion by Councillor Eddie Reeves - Farming

This Council considers that the government's changes in its Autumn budget to Inheritance Tax treatment of farmland, increases to employers' National Insurance and introduction of a new fertiliser tax on key agricultural imports will have a detrimental cumulative impact on family farms across Oxfordshire.

This Council notes with concern that these family farm taxes risk:

- Adversely affecting local farmers' potential to employ people in Oxfordshire's rural economy;
- Damaging the ability for family farmers to pass on their farms to their children; and
- Making food production at competitive prices more difficult for us as a county.

This Council requests Cabinet to ensure that:

1. Its own policies are as supportive of local farmers as reasonably possible;
2. The newly integrated Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership ('OxLEP') prioritises the local rural economy in its governance structure and ongoing development of its strategic plan;

3. The Cabinet Member for the Environment organises a meeting with local farmers and elected members of all political groups to listen to their concerns with a view to informing the Council's and OxLEP's ongoing policy development.

This Council requests the Leader to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer and Secretary of State for the Environment, Food and Rural Affairs to ask that introduction of these family farm taxes be reconsidered for the sake of environmental protection and food security.

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.

15. Motion by Councillor Charlie Hicks - Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Transport in Central Oxfordshire

This Council agreed to set up a Citizens' Assembly on the Future of Transport in Central Oxfordshire as part of its last budget. This Council considers that it is time for such a Citizens' Assembly, focused on reducing congestion, to be established. It should happen this financial year.

This Council notes that its ambitious suite of traffic management measures is due to be rolled out in the very near future. These include Oxford's traffic filters and workplace parking levy, which are now largely enshrined in the Council's budget and will take place unless there is a change of administration next year.

If all such measures go ahead, Oxfordshire motorists could be hit by £57million in fines in fines and charges, broken down as follows:

- Expanded Zero Emissions Zone £25m;
- Traffic Filters £11m;
- Workplace Parking Tax £21m.

For clarity, the purpose of a Congestion Citizens' Assembly would be to assess the likely effectiveness of such measures, provide recommendations on existing proposals and advise as to whether other measures might be given effect after next year's local elections as supplements or substitutes for such policies, putting residents' voices at the heart of the decision-making process.

Council requests Cabinet to establish a Congestion Citizens' Assembly of Central Oxfordshire citizens, with an advisory group to comprise elected members, local businesspeople, public sector leaders from the Council's health, education and blue light partners, civil society and faith group leaders, and academics with relevant expertise in the field.

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.

16. Motion by Councillor Ian Middleton - Badger culling

In 2018 this Council passed a motion stating that it was opposed to the licensing of a badger cull in Oxfordshire.

When DEFRA announced badger culling would be phased out by 2025, many people believed that the cull had ended. Sadly, culling in Oxfordshire intensified, seemingly with the intent of shooting as many badgers as possible before the deadline with over 50% of the county in the killing zones.

Numerous scientific reports show that culling is ineffective as a control measure, yet DEFRA, the NFU and British Cattle Veterinary Association and others continue to advocate its use.

While it's welcomed that the Labour government has abandoned plans to allow up to 100% of badgers to be killed in some areas, there was a hope that they would cancel the cull altogether and focus on cattle based measures, including support for farmers over improved biosecurity, and a move towards testing and vaccination.

However it now seems likely that the government will permit the cull to continue for at least the next 5 years meaning even more badgers in Oxfordshire will be senselessly slaughtered.

This Council therefore :

1. Re-affirms our opposition to badger culling which has been shown to be an ineffective control measure for Bovine tuberculosis.
2. Asks the Cabinet to consider a specific policy that badger culling will not be permitted on Council-owned land.
3. Requests that the Leader writes to DEFRA making clear our continued opposition to the cull and any extension of it in size and scope.

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.

17. Motion by Councillor Eddie Reeves - Congestion Commission

This Council considered setting up a Congestion Commission as part of its last budget debate. This measure was not taken up at the time. However, this Council now considers that it is time for such a commission to be established.

This Council notes that its ambitious suite of traffic management measures is due to be rolled out, in large measure, before the next set of elections to Oxfordshire County Council in May 2025. These include Oxford's traffic filters and workplace parking tax, which are now largely enshrined in the Council's budget and will take place unless there is a change of administration next year.

If all such measures go ahead, Oxfordshire motorists could be hit by £57million in fines and charges over a five-year period broken down as follows:

- Expanded Zero Emissions Zone £25m;
- Traffic Filters (Four-sector Plan) £11m;
- Workplace Parking Tax £21m.

For clarity, the purpose of a Congestion Commission is not to water down or frustrate the administration's policies, for which there is budgetary provision. Rather, its object would be to assess the likely effectiveness of such measures and advise as to whether other measures might be given effect after next year's local elections as supplements or substitutes for such policies.

Council requests Cabinet to establish a Congestion Commission to comprise elected members, local businesspeople, public sector leaders from the Council's health, education and blue light partners, civil society and faith group leaders, and academics with relevant expertise in the field.

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 by Councillor Liz Brighthouse - Dark Skies

This Council, being concerned about the lack of political governance in relation to Dark Skies, the plan to switch off many of the county's streetlights between 11pm - 6.30am, calls on the Cabinet to carry out a full consultation before bringing this back for decision making. Such consultation to include all county councillors alongside community groups and particularly those working with women and girls.

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.

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, 5 November 2024 commencing at 10.30 am and finishing at 3.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Alison Rooke – in the Chair

Councillors:

Mark Lygo (Vice-Chair)	Ted Fenton	Michael O'Connor
Juliette Ash	Donna Ford	Glynis Phillips
Brad Baines	Andrew Gant	Susanna Pressel
David Bartholomew	Stefan Gawrysiak	Eddie Reeves
Tim Bearder	Kate Gregory	G.A. Reynolds
Felix Bloomfield	Jane Hanna OBE	Judy Roberts
Liz Brighthouse OBE	Jenny Hannaby	David Rouane
Nigel Champken-Woods	Damian Haywood	Les Sibley
Mark Cherry	Charlie Hicks	Nigel Simpson
Andrew Coles	John Howson	Roz Smith
Yvonne Constance OBE	Tony Ilott	Ian Snowdon
Ian Corkin	Bob Johnston	Peter Stevens
Imade Edosomwan	Liz Leffman	Dr Pete Sudbury
Trish Elphinstone	Nick Leverton	Bethia Thomas
Duncan Enright	Dan Levy	Michael Waine
Mohamed Fadlalla	Dr Nathan Ley	Liam Walker
Arash Fatemian	Kieron Mallon	
Neil Fawcett	Ian Middleton	

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.

101/24 MINUTES

(Agenda Item 1)

The minutes of the meeting held on 10 September 2024 were approved as an accurate record with the following amendment:

Item 88/24, 8th paragraph:

Councillor Bartholomew asked the Cabinet Member to provide details of the steps being taken to recover debt owed to the County Council **referred to in paragraph 110 in the Annex to the Business Management & Monitoring Report - May 2024**. Councillor Levy promised to send a written response.

102/24 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

(Agenda Item 2)

Apologies were received from Councillors Banfield, Bennett, Bulmer, Field-Johnson, Graham, van Mierlo, Miller, Povolotsky and Saul.

103/24 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST - SEE GUIDANCE NOTE

(Agenda Item 3)

There were no declarations of interest.

104/24 OFFICIAL COMMUNICATIONS

(Agenda Item 4)

The Chair congratulated those involved in three County Council projects that had been shortlisted for awards:

- Best Local Authority EV Charging Scheme in the Transport + Energy Awards 2024.
- Partnerships for Excellence Award at next month's UK Bus Awards.
- Utility Week Awards in the Unlocking Data category.

A full list of events attended by the Chair and Vice Chair had been included in the Schedule of Business. The Chair particularly highlighted the Community Awards Ceremony, Chipping Norton on 27 September as a marvellous example of a community working to support each other. At the Oxford's Older People's Day in the Town Hall on 1 October many of the stalls were staffed by Council officers representing our services for older people.

There were also congratulations to those involved in the careers fair hosted by Oxfordshire Care Leaver Association at County Hall the previous week.

The Chair invited all to attend coming events:

- The County Hall Christmas lights switch on, Wednesday 4th December at 2.30pm in the Common Hall.
- The Christmas tree lighting in Oxford Castle at 6pm on Thursday 5th December in the Castle Courtyard.
- Oxfordshire County Council Chair's Carol Service. Hosted by the Chair and the Rt Rev Gavin Collins, Bishop of Dorchester at 6.30pm on Monday 16th December at St Michael and All Angels Church, Abingdon.
- Oxfordshire County Council Chair's Charity Gala Dinner on Friday 10th January 2025 at the Mercure Oxford Hawkwell House Hotel, Church Way, Iffley, 7pm for 7.30pm. Details on how to order tickets were included the Schedule of Business.

Council was also notified of the passing in August of former Councillor Rosemarie Higham, who represented Banbury, Grimsbury & Castle Division

from May 2005 to March 2006. She served on the Democracy & Organisation Committee, Community Safety Committee and Standards Committee. She also served on Cherwell District Council and Banbury Town Council and was Town Mayor for 2003-04.

Councillors Mallon and Brighouse paid tribute to her work on the councils and in support of the community in Banbury. Members stood for a minute's silence in memory.

105/24 APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda Item 5)

Council approved the following appointments:

Councillor Johnston to fill a vacancy on the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Scrutiny Panel.

Councillor Stevens to replace Councillor Roberts on the Planning & Regulation Committee.

106/24 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda Item 6)

The following petitions were received by Council:

Josie Proctor: City Centre Playground and highway use – 1700 signatures

Niaz Ali: Parking on Hollow Way – 57 signatures

Linda Elms: Small Businesses – 59 signatures

The following members of the public addressed Council:

Item 13 – Motion by Cllr Gawrysiak

Robert Aitken

Item 17 – Motion by Cllr Middleton

Linda Ward

The texts of speeches that have been supplied to us by the speakers are published alongside the minutes.

107/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC

(Agenda Item 7)

Three questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions are recorded in an Annex below.

108/24 QUESTIONS WITH NOTICE FROM MEMBERS OF THE COUNCIL

(Agenda Item 8)

Twenty seven questions were asked. The questions, responses and supplementary questions are recorded in an Annex below.

109/24 REPORT OF THE CABINET

(Agenda Item 9)

Council received the report of Cabinet covering the Cabinet meetings on 17 September and 15 October 2024.

On item 4, Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Board Annual Report 2023-24, Councillor Pressel noted that the number of strengths and needs forms completed in 2023-24 was well below target and asked what was being done to meet the target this year. Councillor Baines asked how the Council was ensuring that children were not at increased risk. Councillor Howson responded that the targets had been set by his predecessor and that officers were working on a strategy to increase the number of assessments in the current year.

Councillor Corkin quoted statistics indicating that people who were in care as a child had a greater risk of entering into the criminal justice system and asked if more attention should be given to that. Councillor Howson responded and agreed that everything possible should be done to keep young children out of the criminal justice system

On item Workforce Report and Staffing Data - Quarter 1 - April to June 2024, Councillor Baines asked when the anticipated £4m saving from reducing agency staff and consultancy work will be achieved and Councillor Phillips asked what was the target figure for reduced spending on agency staff. Councillor Fawcett responded that the figures showed that the Council was consistently moving in the right direction. He did not have the target figure to hand but it was in the budget. He believed that the new simpler recruitment process would lead to a reduction in reliance on agency staff which were often being engaged to provide cover during the recruitment process which was lengthy under the old system.

On item 6, Ethical Procurement Policy, Councillor O'Connor asked if the Cabinet Member would consider inserting fair employment clauses at the contract level. Councillor Levy responded that the point of the new policy was to embed ethical practices in the procurement policy but he would take the councillor's point to officers to see if there was more that could be done.

Councillor Baines asked if the Cabinet Member would bring forward an ethical policy for the disposal of public buildings. Councillor Levy responded that the Council would attempt to maximise the income so that this could be reinvested in services or other capital expenditure while at the same time doing that in an ethical way.

On item 7, Business Management and Monitoring Report - July 2024, Councillor Baines asked what the plans were to strengthen the savings plan for Children's Services and drive down the cost of care. Councillor Levy

responded that, regarding the High Needs Block, some money would come from the government but it was not yet known how much. Delivering services was the number one priority. There was progress on achieving savings but it was slower than hoped for.

Councillor Brighthouse noted how the High Needs Block had grown in the last year and asked if the Cabinet Member will be providing additional resources in the budget as central government had. Councillor Levy noted that the same problem of growing demand was faced by all councils. The new government recognised the issue and awarded extra funding of £1b but that would not go far. The key issue was how the government would tackle the accumulated deficits and that had not been decided yet.

On item 9, Capital Programme Approvals - September 2024, Councillor Enright asked if there was going to be a strategic plan to continue on from the Housing and Growth Deal. Councillor Levy responded that there had been issues with the different pots of money – some time-limited and others not linked to inflation. The projects that will not be funded from the deal will need to be included in the capital budget.

Councillor Hicks asked if the Cabinet Member could confirm that all budget lines will align with LTCP5 (Local Transport and Connectivity Plan). Councillor Levy confirmed that LTCP5 is the policy of the Council and so all budget proposals will be in line with that.

On item 10, Budget and Business Planning Report, Councillor Baines asked if the Cabinet Member welcomed the increased funding from the new government for local services. Councillor Levy responded that he would welcome all extra funding but it was unclear how those funds would be distributed and there was concern that Oxfordshire might not get its fair share.

Councillor Bartholomew asked if the budget plans had been seriously disrupted by the government's increase in national insurance contributions. Councillor Levy responded that it was expected that some or all of that would be reimbursed for the Council. The bigger impact was likely to be on the Council's contractors and subcontractors.

On item 11, Capital Programme and Monitoring Report, Councillor Hicks noted that only £1 out of every £14 spent on travel overall was being spent on Active Travel and asked if the Cabinet Member planned on increasing that ratio. Councillor Levy responded that he was a supporter of active travel and he welcomed the government's commitment to providing multi-year funding from next year as that would enable the Council to plan projects properly.

Councillor Baines asked for an update on the capital funding shortfall including which schemes were the biggest drivers of inflation and which schemes were at greatest risk. Councillor Levy said that he would respond to that question in writing.

Councillor Enright asked if there were lessons to be learned from the Housing and Growth deal in terms of delays in projects and the impact of inflation. Councillor Levy agreed that there were some things the Council could improve to be more efficient but he did not believe that the Council was the main source of the delays. Projects needed to be better matched to the funding available with better account taken of the impact of delays and inflation.

On item 12, Sustainable School Travel Strategy 2024-25, Councillor Brighthouse noted that this came to Cabinet on 17 September while three days later there was a scrutiny committee discussion on school transport. She asked if scrutiny should not have been consulted before the Cabinet decision. Councillor Roberts responded that the strategy was a statutory requirement that had to be decided by a particular date. There would then be an action plan and the feedback from the scrutiny meeting would feed into that.

Councillor Constance asked if school bus schedules could be altered to ensure that children arrive in time for the start of their school day. Councillor Howson responded that his main concern was that free school transport ended at age 16 and he hoped that the new government would address that.

Councillor Coles asked if the Council could provide more support for the School Streets scheme as some schools struggle to have enough volunteers. Councillor Baines noted that only a small number of schools had been included and asked if this displayed a lack of ambition. Councillor Gant responded that the schemes would move to camera enforcement reducing the dependence on volunteers who have been doing great work in supporting these schemes. He stated that it was a case of lack of funding not a lack of ambition.

Councillor Phillips asked when a pedestrian crossing could be installed to allow children from Risinghurst to cross the dual carriageway safely to their bus stop for travel to Wheatley Park School. Councillor Gant noted that there were legal constraints on the impact that pedestrian crossings could have on traffic flows which meant that reducing car traffic was a key part of ensuring safe travel to school.

On item 13, Community Wealth Building - Action Plan and Next Steps, Councillor Baines asked about the application of a recommendation in the report, to prioritise surplus land for affordable housing and business space rather than maximum return, in the sale of County Hall. Councillor Ley responded that he could not answer that now but that the Cabinet will continue to be transparent about the process as it develops.

Councillor Cherry asked if there was collaboration with district councils on tackling inequalities and deprivation. Councillor Ley confirmed that this was the case as there were issues in many towns around the county.

On item 14, His Majesty's Inspectorate of Constabulary and Fire and Rescue Services (HMICFRS) Report for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue Service, Councillor Baines asked why there had been a decline in all but two assessed areas and if the public can be confident that OFRS will manage money responsibly and take appropriate preventative action. Councillor Ley responded that six of the key recommendations had already been addressed, an improvement board had been put place which will report to scrutiny committee and the plan will be completed within the two years.

110/24 OXFORDSHIRE'S ANNUAL YOUTH JUSTICE PLAN 2024-2025

(Agenda Item 10)

Council was asked to approve an Annual Youth Justice Plan which it is required to produce as youth offending is a statutory and regulated service.

The report was moved by Councillor John Howson and seconded by Councillor Liz Leffman. Following discussion, Council agreed the recommendation unanimously.

RESOLVED: to adopt Oxfordshire's Annual Youth Justice Plan 2024-2025.

111/24 CALENDAR OF MEETINGS 2025-26

(Agenda Item 11)

Council had before it a list of proposed dates for Council, Cabinet and committee meetings for the Council Year 2025-26.

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

RESOLVED: to approve the calendar of meetings for the 2025-26 Council year attached to the report as Annex 1.

112/24 APPOINTMENT OF INDEPENDENT PERSONS

(Agenda Item 12)

Council was asked to consider the appointment of two Independent Persons. An Independent Person must be consulted and their views taken in to account before the Council makes its decision in certain disciplinary processes.

The recommendations were proposed by Councillor Ted Fenton, Chair of the Audit & Governance Committee, and seconded by Councillor Roz Smith, Deputy Chair. Following discussion the recommendations were approved with 52 votes in favour, one abstention and no votes against.

RESOLVED:

a) To appoint Mr Nicholas Holt-Kentwell and Mr Andrew Mills-Hicks as Independent Persons for Oxfordshire County Council from 1 December

2024 to 30 November 2026. The appointments may be renewed once for a period of two years.

b) To thank Mr Martyn Hocking for his service to the Council as an Independent Person from 14 July 2020 until 30 November 2024.

113/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR STEFAN GAWRYSIAK

(Agenda Item 13)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Gawrysiak and seconded by Councillor Reeves. Following debate, the motion was carried with 52 votes in favour; 0 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

In December Oxfordshire County Council removed seven beds from the Chiltern care home without any consultation with the GP's, Henley Town Council or the community of South Oxfordshire. This lack of consultation by the Council is unacceptable and must not be repeated.

These beds were originally provided as 'NHS beds'.

Following FOI requests to the Integrated Care Board Buckinghamshire Oxfordshire Berkshire West (ICB BOB) and the Council, it has been established that these beds are NHS beds funded by the ICB, this Council and the Oxford Health NHS Foundation Trust. They should not therefore have been closed without full and proper public consultation.

Dr Broughton interim Chief Executive of the ICB BOB states 28th February 2024

"The beds have not 'lost NHS funding', "The beds continued to be overseen by the Oxford University Hospital Hub team."

These beds are therefore NHS beds which cannot be removed without consultation.

This Council:

1. Deplores the beds' removal without said consultation.
2. Believes that a full and objective account as to why these beds, which serve a population of 140,000 of South Oxfordshire, were removed and what replacement measures have since been taken.

This Council requests that Cabinet:

3. Asks partners to seek to account for the reasons why the seven Chiltern Court Beds serving South Oxfordshire cannot be reinstated, bearing in mind the new measures that have since been in place and, in the absence of such an account, take steps to reinstate them.

4. Conduct all necessary public consultations.

114/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR EDDIE REEVES

(Agenda Item 14)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Reeves and seconded by Councillor Walker.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Baines and seconded by Councillor Enright.

~~“This Council notes the Government’s decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments (WFPs). Age UK estimates that such changes could hit 2 million people across the country, some of whom badly need the money to stay warm this winter.~~

~~This Council resolves to:~~

1. Recognises that the new Government inherited a terrible fiscal inheritance with £22 billion of unfunded spending commitments which had not been reported to the Office for Budget Responsibility. Left unaddressed this would have posed a major risk to the nation’s economy with the budget deficit increasing by 25%.

2. Welcomes the Government’s commitment to increasing the uptake of Pension Credit, aligning Pension Credit and Housing Benefit, extending the Household Support Fund and protecting the triple lock.

~~4. 3. Requests that the Cabinet requests a report from officers with proposals for promoting a **countywide** District awareness campaign working with our **City and District Councils**, local NHS partners, Parish Councils and charitable, civic and religious groups, to encourage elderly residents who are eligible for means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit to register and claim them to ensure that they continue to receive WFPs this Winter and that those in need are sign-posted to the continuing Household Support Fund;~~

~~2. Request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, urging an impact assessment of the government’s decision to means test WFPs and asking HM Treasury to examine transitional measures to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who are eligible for, but who do not — or cannot — claim, other benefits under current thresholds, are protected from fuel poverty.~~

~~3. Request that the Cabinet reprioritises monies within the Council’s budget for 2024/5 held within the Budget Priority Reserve and/or within other relevant contingency funds or reserves, with a view to establishing an Oxfordshire Winter Fuel Payment Protection Fund, akin to the Oxfordshire Resident Support Scheme, to ensure that pensioners who are in genuine~~

~~hardship, but who are not eligible for other government support, are helped through the Winter."~~

Following debate, the amendment by Councillor Baines was lost with 13 votes in favour, 37 against and 1 abstention.

An amendment was proposed by Councillor Levy and seconded by Councillor Ley. This amendment was accepted by the proposer and seconder and by Council.

Following debate, the motion as amended was carried with 35 votes in favour, 13 against and no abstentions.

RESOLVED:

This Council notes the government's decision to means-test Winter Fuel Payments (WFPs). Age UK estimates that such changes could **affect** ~~hit~~ 2 million people across the country, some of whom **may** badly need the money to stay warm this winter.

This Council resolves to:

1. Request that the Cabinet ~~requests a report from officers with proposals for promoting a District awareness campaign working with our local~~ **works with NHS, District Councils, partners, Parish Councils and charitable, civic and religious groups, to promote the full range of available support for low-income pensioners, including the Resident Support Scheme (RSS) and Better Housing Better Health.** ~~encourage elderly residents who are eligible for means-tested benefits such as Pension Credit to register and claim them to ensure that they continue to receive WFPs this Winter and that those in need are sign-posted to the continuing Recent Household Support Fund allocations have enabled these programs to expand and directly assist pensioners impacted by WFP changes, with libraries participating in the Warm Spaces initiative positioned for outreach to high-footfall pensioner areas.~~

2. Request that the Leader of the Council writes to the Chancellor of the Exchequer, ~~urging~~ **calling for an impact assessment and transitional measures for pensioners affected by** ~~of the government's decision to means testing WFPs and asking HM Treasury to examine transitional measures to ensure that vulnerable pensioners, particularly those who are eligible for, but who do not — or cannot — claim, other benefits under current thresholds, are protected from fuel poverty.~~ **This outreach should address barriers to Pension Credit access and advocate for simplified application processes to ensure equitable access.**

3. Request ~~that the Cabinet~~ **to include addressing fuel poverty among low-income pensioners in the priorities of the council when allocating resources, for example using the Household Support Fund. Priority should be given to strengthening existing high-demand support programs and partnerships to maximize local resources.** ~~reprioritises~~

~~monies within the Council's budget for 2024/5 held within the Budget Priority Reserve and/or within other relevant contingency funds or reserves, with a view to establishing an Oxfordshire Winter Fuel Payment Protection Fund, akin to the Oxfordshire Resident Support Scheme, to ensure that pensioners who are in genuine hardship, but who are not eligible for other government support, are helped through the Winter.~~

115/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR MARK CHERRY

(Agenda Item 15)

The motion was proposed by Councillor Cherry and seconded by Councillor Baines. Following debate, the motion was carried with 45 votes in favour; 0 against and 0 abstentions.

RESOLVED:

Council requests Cabinet to consider approving the Councils for Fair Tax declaration.

This commits Councils to

- Lead by example and demonstrate good practice in our tax conduct, right across our activities.
- Ensure IR35 is implemented robustly and contract workers pay a fair share of employment taxes.
- Not use offshore vehicles for the purchase of land and property, especially where this leads to reduced payments of stamp duty.
- Undertake due diligence to ensure that not-for-profit structures are not being used inappropriately by suppliers as an artificial device to reduce the payment of tax and business rates.
- Demand clarity on the ultimate beneficial ownership of suppliers, UK and overseas, and their consolidated profit & loss position, given lack of clarity could be strong indicators of poor financial probity and weak financial standing.
- Promote Fair Tax Mark certification especially for any business in which we have a significant stake and where corporation tax is due.
- Support Fair Tax Week events in the area, and celebrate the tax contribution made by responsible businesses that are proud to promote responsible tax conduct and pay their fair share of corporation tax.

Council also requests the Leader of the Council to write to the Chancellor of the Exchequer supporting calls for urgent reform of UK procurement law to enable local authorities to better penalise poor tax conduct and reward good tax conduct through their procurement policies.

116/24 MOTION BY COUNCILLOR JANE HANNA

(Agenda Item 16)

Councillor Hanna raised a point of order under Council Procedure Rules 15.6.1 stating that she believed the amendment proposed to this motion

introduced a substantially different proposal in that it effectively removed the Council as a stakeholder in the issue.

The Monitoring Officer responded that the amendment still involved writing a letter and the question of what was included in that letter was a matter for Council. If Members disagreed with the amendment, her advice was that they could vote against it.

The motion was proposed by Councillor Hanna and seconded by Councillor Levy.

The following amendment was proposed by Councillor Baines and seconded by Councillor Brighthouse.

“This Council notes that Oxfordshire's High Needs Block deficit is estimated to be £21.3 million for 2023/24, while across England the deficit totals £3.16 billion. The statutory override currently in place allows local authorities to temporarily hold this debt off their balance sheets but this measure only delays addressing a growing financial crisis.

The reasons behind the High Needs Block deficit are complex and reflect deep, systemic issues within the Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) system. **These issues were exacerbated by moves to increase eligibility for statutory support without additional financial assistance following the Coalition's Children and Families Act 2014.** ~~It is unrealistic to expect local authorities to manage such significant deficits in a short time frame without reform of the SEND system and baseline funding increases.~~

This Council believes that the current SEND system has lost the confidence of families.

This Council welcomes the new Government's commitment to regaining parents' confidence and commitment to whole-system reform. Council recognises these reforms will take time to develop and implement and welcomes the independent insight provided by the recent National Audit Office report.

~~Current SEND funding is based on outdated need due to an inadequate funding formula. Education Health Care Plans have risen from 3000 in 2014 to more than 7000 in 2024. Without reform, if the statutory override were to be removed, a quarter of local authorities would be insolvent within one year and another quarter within three years.~~

This Council requests that the Leader of the Council writes to the **Government welcoming the Treasury's contribution of £1 billion additional funding this year for SEND and plans for a Children's Wellbeing Bill** Secretary of State for Education to seek urgent clarity on the government's long-term plan for addressing the High Needs Block deficit. ~~Council recommends that the letter should call for reform of the SEND system to ensure it is fit for purpose and provide appropriate baseline~~

~~funding to ensure local authorities can sustainably manage their financial responsibilities without resorting to temporary fixes."~~

Following debate, a motion was proposed to put the question of the amendment, proposed by Councillor Bartholomew and seconded by Councillor Reeves.

The motion was carried with 29 votes in favour, 11 against and 0 abstentions.

Following the summing up by the mover, the amendment was lost with 13 votes in favour, 29 against and 0 abstentions.

Following further debate on the motion, it was carried with 28 votes in favour, 14 against and no abstentions.

117/24 MOTIONS BY MEMBERS

(Agenda Items 17 to 20)

The time being 3.30 pm, these Motions were considered dropped in accordance with Council Procedure Rule 5.2.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

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Agenda Item 5

Terms of Reference – Shareholder Committee

(Cabinet 19 November 2024)

Purpose

1. The purpose of the Shareholder Committee is to approve and oversee the council's strategic objectives for the council's company and to support the development of the company in line with the council's regulations and ambitions and the constitutional instruments of the company.
2. The Shareholder Committee will provide strategic oversight of the council's company and provide assurance to the cabinet that the company is compliant with the council's constitution, rules and procedures including achieving best value.
3. The Shareholder Committee will take decisions on any matters that are reserved to the council as member or shareholder in the company's Articles of Association or Shareholders Agreement and will receive annual and periodic reports for the company.
4. The Shareholder Committee will not have operational control over the council's company. The day-to-day operation of the company is the responsibility of the Directors. The Shareholder Committee will provide overarching oversight including business case sign off in line with the company constitutional governance. Operational liaison with the council's company will be between the client service of the Council and the Chief Executive Officer/Managing Director of the company.

Membership

5. The Shareholder Committee shall subject to (7) below comprise such of the Cabinet Members as the Cabinet shall determine.
6. The Leader of the Council and Deputy Leader of the Council shall have the right to attend and speak at meetings of the Committee.
7. In the absence of any or all the members referred to in (5) above any Cabinet Member(s) nominated by the Leader of the Council or the Deputy Leader of the Council may act in their place as full voting members of the Committee.

Chair

8. The Committee shall appoint one of its members to act as its Chair, but that member shall not be entitled to cast a second or casting vote.

Quorum

9. The Shareholder Committee quorum will be two voting members.

Competency

10. All members of the Shareholder Committee and Cabinet members attending as reserves must:
- have undertaken mandatory training in the relevant law and procedures which relate to the Committee's work; and
 - undertake further mandatory training, on an ad hoc basis, when there are changes to procedure or relevant legislation that are deemed significant by the relevant Director

Meeting Frequency

11. The Committee will meet at such times as shall be agreed by its members. Any member of the Council shall be entitled to attend and observe any meeting of the Committee.

Decision making

12. Decisions will be taken by a consensus of members present unless any member of the Shareholder Committee requests a vote, in which case a majority decision will be taken with each member present having a single vote.

Attendees

13. The council's Chief Executive, the Executive Director of Resources (Section 151 Officer) and the Monitoring Officer will advise the Shareholder Committee and representatives of the company, including the Company Secretary, shall be invited to all meetings on a non-voting basis.
14. Other members may be invited to attend meetings on a non-voting basis.
15. Meetings will be operated in accordance with the following rules:
- Agendas will be published 5 clear working days in advance of meetings.
 - Members of the public will be able to observe the public parts of meetings and access papers relating to any public business for each company and joint venture
 - Officers on the Council will be able to observe the public parts of meetings and access papers relating to any public business for each company and joint venture but will only be able to attend private parts of meetings and access papers relating to private business where specifically authorised to do so by the Chair or a statutory officer.

Relationship to Scrutiny

16. The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee has the ability to scrutinise the business and decisions of the Shareholder Committee and to make recommendations to the Shareholder Committee. Decisions of the Shareholder Committee will be subject to call in by the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee or any 4 members.

Divisions- N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL – 10 December 2024

REPORT OF THE CABINET

Cabinet Member: Leader

1. Including Everyone Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Framework 2025 – 2029

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

The Equality Act (2010) requires local authorities to publish equality objectives at least every four years to comply with the public sector equality duty. The previous Including Everyone framework was published in 2020. Cabinet considered a report on the proposed updated framework which was required to be published by the end of 2024.

The report highlighted the council's commitment to ensuring that all residents, regardless of their background, had equal access to opportunities and services. The proposed framework outlined several key objectives, including reducing inequalities, promoting diversity, and fostering an inclusive culture within the council and the wider community. Specific goals included improving representation of underrepresented groups, enhancing accessibility of services, and addressing systemic barriers to equality.

Cabinet agreed to adopt the refreshed Including Everyone Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion framework, 2025-2029 and endorsed the data-led approach to implementing the new Including Everyone framework through corporate key performance indicators (KPIs).

2. Local Enterprise Partnership Integration - Phase 2

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet had before it a report providing an update following the integration of functions previously exercised by the Local Enterprise Partnership into the council on 1 April 2024.

Cabinet approved the recommendations including the retention of the existing council owned company OxLEP for the delivery of some economic functions subject to a revised contract, and the establishment of a Shareholder Committee comprising all members of the Cabinet, and an Oxfordshire Economic Partnership Board to support the Cabinet in the discharge of its economic development functions.

Cabinet Member: Deputy Leader with Responsibility for Climate Change, Environment and Future Generations

3. Climate Action Programme Six Month Update

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet had before it a report which provided a six-monthly update on the delivery of the 2024/25 Climate Action Programme workstreams.

The report also provided an overview of the council's Carbon Management Plan 2030 delivery. Capital programme workstreams were progressing to support the decarbonisation and resilience of the council's fleet and property. This investment will reduce emissions by a further 64% compared to 2019/20 over the next three years.

Cabinet noted the biannual update on the delivery of the Climate Action Programme and the greenhouse gas emissions reports for wider Oxfordshire area which would be presented to the Future Oxfordshire Partnership Board on 26 November 2024.

Cabinet Members: Children, Education and Young People's Services & SEND Improvement

4. Educational Psychology Assessment Service

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet received a report requesting approval to join appropriate Framework/s to provide Educational Psychology Services (EPS), to meet the needs of the local authority for the provision of high-quality Educational Psychologists.

Educational Psychology assessments and reports are required for children and young people who were being assessed for an Education, Health and Care assessment under the Children and Families Act 2014.

Cabinet approved: -

- a) Oxfordshire County Council ("the Council") joining appropriate single supplier framework agreements set up by external organisations to enable the Council access to call off contracts with the supplier/s for Educational Psychology services.
- b) the Council entering call-off contracts under such framework agreements in November/December 2024 and for a budgetary commitment for a period of 3 years.

Cabinet Member: Finance

5. Treasury Management Mid Term Review 2024/25

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) 'Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021' requires that 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 30 September 2024.

The report provided insights into the council's investment strategies, borrowing activities, and overall financial health. Cabinet reiterated the importance of maintaining a balanced and prudent approach to treasury management to ensure the council's financial stability and sustainability.

Cabinet noted the report and recommended Council to note the council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2024/25.

6. Business Management and Monitoring Report - September 2024

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet considered a report presenting the September 2024 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.

Cabinet noted the report and approved the financial adjustments as recommended. Cabinet also approved the introduction of new charges for monitoring of biodiversity net gain compliance and the increased charges in 2024/25 for the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS).

7. Capital Programme Approvals - November 2024

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet had before it a report which set out change requests requiring Cabinet approval that will be incorporated into the agreed Capital programme and included in the next update for Cabinet in December 2024.

Cabinet approved the inclusion of East Oxford Mini Holland project into the capital programme with a value of £6.646m. £6.000m is to be funded from corporate resources, agreed by Council in February 2024, with the remaining £0.646m to be funded by S106 developer contributions.

Cabinet Members: Infrastructure & Development Strategy & Transport Management

8. Local Transport and Connectivity Plan Monitoring Report

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet had before it a report providing an overview of the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan (LTCP) monitoring report. It summarised the background to the report and key issues. It also provided an overview of proposed changes to the LTCP.

The LTCP adopted by the council in July 2022, outlined the long-term vision for transport and travel in the county and the policies required to deliver this. The LTCP also included a set of headline targets to track delivery of the vision. This included targets to replace or remove one out of every four current car trips in Oxfordshire by 2030, deliver a net-zero transport network by 2040 and have zero, or as close as possible, road fatalities or serious injuries by 2050.

Cabinet noted the progress made on delivering the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan to date and approved the monitoring report for publication.

Cabinet Member: Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety

9. Outline allocation of cost of living and associated community wealth building funding for October to March 2024/25

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet considered a report which set out the intended approach to support those residents who are most negatively impacted by cost-of-living pressures over the remainder of the current financial year. This followed the government announcement of an extension to the Household Support Fund from 1 October 2024 to 31 March 2025. The report also provided the latest position on the impact of the cost of living, as well as providing a summary of Cost-of-Living expenditure for the first half of the year.

Cabinet approved the support package for the second half of the 2024-25 financial year and delegated authority to the Director of Public Affairs, Policy & Partnerships in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Public Health, Inequalities and Community Safety, to amend the programme during the year in response to changing and emerging need, within the overall programme budget

Cabinet Member: SEND Improvement

10. Cabinet Response to Council Motion on SEND Services

(Cabinet: 19 November 2024)

Cabinet had before it a report on a proposed response to a motion on SEND services by Cllr Sally Povolotsky carried by the Full Council. Following an inspection of the local area partnership (the local authority and integrated care board) in Summer 2023, the LAP was found to have 'systemic weaknesses. As a result, a priority action plan (PAP) was developed to tackle the key issues raised by the inspection. The PAP was approved by the Department for Education (DfE) in December 2023. At its heart, the PAP has a commitment to making the voices of children and young people 'heard' as part of the improvement journey.

The motion passed by Full Council proposed several improvements, including increased funding for SEND services and better training for staff. There was a call for more collaboration between different agencies and stakeholders involved in providing SEND support. The importance of involving parents and carers in the decision-making process was highlighted.

Cabinet approved the response to the motion recommended in the report.

LIZ LEFFMAN

Leader of the Council

December 2024

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Division(s): N/A

COUNCIL – 10 DECEMBER 2024

TREASURY MANAGEMENT MID TERM REVIEW 2024/25

Report by the Executive Director of Finance and Section 151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. Council is **RECOMMENDED** to note the Council's treasury management activity in the first half of 2024/25.

Executive Summary

2. Treasury management is defined as: "The management of the organisation's borrowing, investments and cash flows, including its banking, money market and capital market transactions, the effective control of the risks associated with those activities, and the pursuit of optimum performance consistent with those risks."
3. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy's (CIPFA's) 'Code of Practice on Treasury Management 2021' requires that committee to which some treasury management responsibilities are delegated, will receive regular monitoring reports on treasury management activities and risks. This report sets out the position at 30 September 2024.
4. Throughout this report, the performance for the first half of the year (1 April to 30 September 2024) is measured against the budget agreed by Council in February 2024.
5. As at 30 September, the council's outstanding debt totalled £279m and the average rate of interest paid on long-term debt during the year was 4.41%. No new external borrowing was arranged during the first half of the year, whilst a £5m LOBO was repaid during the first half of the year. The Council's forecast debt financing position for 2024/25 is shown in Annex 1.
6. The [Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25](#) agreed in February 2024 assumed an average base rate of 4.50%.
7. The average daily balance of temporary surplus cash invested in-house was expected to be £463m in 2024/25, with an average in-house return of 4.25%.
8. During the first half of the year the Council achieved an average in-house return of 4.95% on average cash balances of £478.542m, producing gross interest receivable of £11.876m. In relation to external funds, the return for the for six months was £1.834m, bringing total investment income to £13.709m. This compares to budgeted investment income of £9.276m, giving a net overachievement of £4.433m.
9. At 30 September 2024, the council's investment portfolio of £540.964m comprised £391.000m of fixed term deposits, £51.103m at short term notice in money market funds

and £98.861m in pooled funds with a variable net asset value. Annex 4 provides an analysis of the investment portfolio at 30 September 2024.

Treasury Management Activity

Debt Financing & Maturing Debt

10. The Strategy for Long Term Borrowing agreed in February 2024 included the option to fund new or replacement borrowing up to the value of £230m through internal borrowing. The aim was to reduce the Council's exposure to credit risk and reduce the long term cost of carry (difference between borrowing costs and investment returns).
11. The council is able to borrow from the Public Works Loan Board (PWLB), through the money markets or via community municipal investments. High inflation over the last 3 years has led to bond yields, and therefore PWLB rates, remaining high. The expectation is that PWLB rates should reduce over the medium term. Given the forecast for borrowing rates, the strategy for 2024/25 assumes the majority of the increase in capital financing requirement to be met through internal borrowing. A small amount of borrowing is planned to be raised via community municipal investments to help finance net zero schemes.
12. As at 30 September 2024, the authority had 43 PWLB loans totalling £244.383m, 6 LOBO¹ loans totalling £30m and one £5m money market loan. The average rate of interest paid on PWLB debt was 4.52% and the average cost of LOBO debt in 2023/24 was 3.91%. The cost of debt on the money market loan was 3.95%. The combined weighted average for interest paid on long-term debt was 4.89%. The Council's debt portfolio as at 30 September 2023 is shown in Annex 1.
13. The Council also repaid one Lender's Option/Borrowers' Option Loan (LOBO) of £5m without penalty when the provider used their option to "call" the loan. No PLWB loans matured during the first half of the year. The weighted average interest rate payable on the matured loans was 3.8%. The forecast outturn for interest payable in 2024/2524 is £12.21m which is below the budgeted figure of £15.32m. The details are set out in Annex 2.

Investment Strategy

14. The Council holds deposits and invested funds representing income received in advance of expenditure plus balances and reserves. The guidance on Local Government Investments in England gives priority to security and liquidity and the Council's aim is to achieve a yield commensurate with these principles. The Council continued to adopt a cautious approach to lending to financial institutions and continuously monitored credit quality information relating to counterparties.
15. During the first half of the financial year term fixed deposits have been placed with other Local Authorities as per the approved lending list, whilst Money Market Funds have been utilised for short-term liquidity. Inter Local Authority lending remains an attractive market to deposit funds with from a security viewpoint, whilst the Government's Debt Management Deposit Facility (DMADF) has also provided a competitive and secure counterparty from time to time.

¹ LOBO (Lender's Option/Borrower's Option) Loans are long-term loans which include a re-pricing option for the bank at predetermined intervals.

16. The Treasury Management Strategy Statement and Annual Investment Strategy for 2024/25 included the use of external fund managers and pooled funds to diversify the investment portfolio through the use of different investment instruments, investment in different markets, and exposure to a range of counterparties. It is expected that these funds should outperform the Council's in-house investment performance over a rolling three-year period. The strategy permitted up to 50% of the total portfolio to be invested with external fund managers and pooled funds (excluding Money Market Funds). The performance of the pooled funds will continue to be monitored by the Treasury Management Strategy Team (TMST) throughout the year against respective benchmarks and the in-house portfolio.
17. At the start of the year the UK Bank Rate was 5.25% which was in line with the forecast. The Bank of England cut rates to 5% in August 2024, with further cuts forecast to bring base rate down to 4.25% by the end of the financial year. Longer term, base rate is expected to fall to 3.00% during 2026.

The Council's Lending List

18. In-house cash balances are deposited with institutions that meet the council's approved credit rating criteria. The approved lending list, which sets out those institutions, is updated to reflect changes in bank and building society credit ratings. Changes are reported to Cabinet as part of the Business Management & Monitoring Report. The approved lending list may also be further restricted by officers, in response to changing conditions and perceived risk. There were no changes to the lending list during the first half of 2024/25.

Investment Performance

19. Temporary surplus cash balances include: developer contributions; council reserves and balances; and various other funds to which the Council pays interest at each financial year end. The budgeted annual return on these in-house balances for 2024/25 was 4.25% and assumed an average annual in-house cash balance of £361.622m.
20. The actual average daily balance of temporary surplus cash invested in-house was £456.059m for the first half of 2024/25 and the average in-house return was 4.95%, producing gross interest receivable of £11.876m. Gross distributions from pooled funds totalling £1.834m were also realised in the first half of the year, bringing total investment income to £13.710m. This compares to budgeted investment income of £9.276m, giving a net overachievement of £4.434m. This reflects a combination of higher than forecast average cash balances, and higher than forecast interest rates.
21. Cash balances for the year are forecast to be lower than they otherwise would be as a result of negative Dedicated Schools Grant balances relating to High Needs. The cumulative negative DSG balance is forecast to be £81.90m by the end of 2024/25. Since this reflects actual cash spent by the council this means there is an estimated opportunity cost of £3.4m in unearned interest for the year. The cumulative opportunity cost of lost interest is estimated to be £6.38m by the end of 2024/25.
22. The Council operates a number of instant access call accounts and money market funds to deposit short-term cash surpluses. During the first half of 2024/25 the average balance held on instant access was £54.376m, at an average rate of 5.12%.

23. At 30 September 2024 the total value of pooled fund investments was £98.861m. This is up from the value as at 30 June 2024 of £97.442m.
24. At 30 September 2024, the council's investment portfolio of £540.964m comprised £391.000m of fixed term deposits, £51.103m at short term notice in money market funds and £98.861m in pooled funds with a variable net asset value. Annex 4 provides an analysis of the investment portfolio at 30 September 2024.
25. The Council's Treasury Management Strategy Team regularly monitors the risk profile of the Council's investment portfolio. An analysis of the credit and maturity position of the portfolio at 30 September 2024 is included at Annex 4.

Prudential Indicators for Treasury Management

26. During the financial quarter, the Council operated within the treasury limits and Prudential Indicators set out in the Council's Treasury Management Strategy for 2024/25. The position as at 30 September 2024 for the Prudential Indicators is shown in Annex 3.

Financial Implications

27. This report is mostly concerned with finance and the implications are set out in the main body of the report.

Comments checked by:

Ian Dyson, Director of Financial & Commercial Services, ian.dyson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

28. The report meets the requirements of both the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy (CIPFA) Code of Practice on Treasury Management and the CIPFA Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities. The Council is required to comply with both Codes through Regulations issued under the Local Government Act 2003. There are no other legal implications.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal, paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Sustainability Implications

29. This report is not expected to have any negative impact with regards to the Council's zero carbon emissions commitment by 2030.

Contact officer: Tim Chapple – Treasury Manager

Contact number: 07917 262935

October 2024

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL DEBT FINANCING 2023/24

<u>Debt Profile</u>		£m
1. PWLB	54%	244.38
2. Other Long Term Loans	9%	<u>40.00</u>
3. Sub-total External Debt		284.38
4. Internal Balances	37%	<u>166.54</u>
5. Actual Debt at 31 March 2024	100%	450.92
6. Prudential Borrowing		77.02
7. Borrowing in Advance		0.00
8. Minimum Revenue Provision		<u>-14.23</u>
9. Forecast Debt at 31 March 2025		513.71
<u>Maturing Debt</u>		
10. PWLB loans maturing during the year		-3.00
11. PWLB/LOBO loans repaid prematurely		<u>-10.00</u>
12. Total Maturing Debt		-13.00
<u>New External Borrowing</u>		
13. PWLB Normal		0.00
14. PWLB loans raised in the course of debt restructuring		0.00
15. Money Market LOBO loans		<u>0.00</u>
16. Total New External Borrowing		0.00
<u>Debt Profile Year End</u>		
17. PWLB	47%	241.38
18. Money Market loans (incl £25m LOBOs)	6%	<u>30.00</u>
19. Forecast Sub-total External Debt		271.38
20. Forecast Internal Balances	47%	<u>242.33</u>
21. Forecast Debt at 31 March 2025	100%	513.71

Line

- 1 – 5 This is a breakdown of the Council's debt at the beginning of the financial year (1 April 2024). The PWLB is a government agency operating within the Debt Management Office. LOBO (Lender's Option/ Borrower's Option) loans are long-term loans, with a maturity of up to 60 years, which includes a re-pricing option for the bank at predetermined time intervals. Internal balances include provisions, reserves, revenue balances, capital receipts unapplied, and excess of creditors over debtors.
- 6 'Prudential Borrowing' reflects Prudential Borrowing taken by the authority there is a robust invest to save model; or the council has a significant unmet capital need.
- 7 'Borrowing in Advance' is the amount the Council borrowed in advance to fund future capital finance costs.
- 8 The charge to revenue made in respect of paying off the principal sum of the borrowing undertaken to finance the capital programme.
- 9 The Council's forecast total debt by the end of the financial year, after taking into account new borrowing, debt repayment and movement in funding by internal balances.
- 10 The Council's normal maturing PWLB debt.
- 11 PWLB debt repaid early during the year.
- 12 Total debt repayable during the year.
- 13 The normal PWLB borrowing undertaken by the Council during 2024/25.
- 14 New PWLB loans to replace debt repaid early.
- 15 The Money Market borrowing undertaken by the Council during 2024/25
- 16 The total external borrowing undertaken.
- 18-22 The Council's forecast debt profile at the end of the year.

Long-Term Debt Maturing 2024/25**Public Works Loan Board: Loans maturing during 2024/25**

Date	Amount £m	Rate %
22/11/2024	3.000	4.250%
Total	3.000	

LOBO Loans called & repaid during 2024/25

Date	Amount £m	Rate %
31/07/2024	5.000	3.800%
02/10/2024	5.000	4.010%
Total	10.000	

Prudential Indicators Monitoring at 30 September 2024

The Local Government Act 2003 requires the Authority to have regard to CIPFA's Prudential Code for Capital Finance in Local Authorities (the Prudential Code) when determining how much money it can afford to borrow. To demonstrate that the Authority has fulfilled the requirements of the Prudential Code the following indicators must be set and monitored each year.

Authorised and Operational Limit for External Debt

Actual debt levels are monitored against the Operational Boundary and Authorised Limit for External Debt below. The Operational Boundary is based on the Authority's estimate of most likely, i.e. prudent, but not worst case scenario for external debt. The council confirms that the Operational Boundary has not been breached during the first quarter of 2024/25.

The Authorised Limit is the affordable borrowing limit determined in compliance with the Local Government Act 2003. It is the maximum debt that the Authority can legally owe. The authorised limit provides headroom over and above the operational boundary for unusual cash movements. The Authority confirms that the Authorised limit was not breached in the first quarter of 2024/25.

Authorised limit for External Debt	£570,000,000
Operational Limit for External Debt	£555,000,000
Capital Financing Requirement for year	£513,527,972

	Actual	Forecast
	30/09/2024	31/03/2025
Borrowing	£279,382,618	£271,382,618
Other Long-Term Liabilities	£ 836,000	£ 836,000
Total	£280,218,618	£272,218,618

Interest Rate Exposures

These indicators are set to control the Authority's exposure to interest rate risk. The upper limits on fixed and variable rate interest exposures. Fixed rate investments are borrowings are those where the rate of interest is fixed for the whole financial year. Instruments that mature during the financial year are classed as variable rate.

Fixed Interest Rate Exposure

Fixed Interest Net Borrowing limit	£350,000,000
Actual at 30 September 2024	-£142,617,382

Variable Interest Rate Exposure

Variable Interest Net Borrowing limit	£0
Actual at 30 September 2024	-£119,127,560

Principal Sums Invested over 365 days

Total sums invested for more than 364 days limit	£215,000,000
Actual sums invested for more than 364 days	£ 30,000,000

Maturity Structure of Borrowing

This indicator is set to control the Authority's exposure to refinancing risk. The upper and lower limits on the maturity structure of fixed rate borrowing and the actual structure at 30 September 2024, are shown below. Time periods start on the first day of each financial year. The maturity date of borrowing is the earliest date on which the lender can demand repayment.

	Limit %	Actual %
Under 12 months	0 – 20	3.58
12 – 24 months	0 – 25	5.01
24 months – 5 years	0 – 35	17.90
5 years to 10 years	5 – 40	30.92
10 years +	25 – 95	42.59

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL INVESTMENT PORTFOLIO 30/09/2023

Fixed term deposits held at 30/09/2024

Counterparty	Principal Deposited	Maturity Date
Falkirk Council	£5,000,000.00	01/10/2024
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	08/10/2024
Orkney Islands Council	£3,000,000.00	10/10/2024
The Highland Council	£5,000,000.00	16/10/2024
London Borough of Haringey Council	£5,000,000.00	18/10/2024
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	23/10/2024
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	24/10/2024
Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire	£5,000,000.00	28/10/2024
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	31/10/2024
Worthing Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	19/11/2024
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	19/11/2024
Aberdeen City Council	£8,000,000.00	19/11/2024
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	20/11/2024
Blackpool Council	£7,000,000.00	22/11/2024
Cambridgeshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	22/11/2024
Cheshire East Council	£5,000,000.00	22/11/2024
Moray Council	£5,000,000.00	26/11/2024
Surrey County Council	£5,000,000.00	02/12/2024
Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside	£5,000,000.00	11/12/2024
London Borough of Newham Council	£5,000,000.00	23/12/2024
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	27/12/2024
Falkirk Council	£5,000,000.00	03/01/2025
Aberdeen City Council	£5,000,000.00	03/01/2025
Conwy County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	03/01/2025
Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire	£5,000,000.00	06/01/2025
Surrey County Council	£3,000,000.00	07/01/2025
South Ayrshire Council	£5,000,000.00	08/01/2025
Surrey County Council	£5,000,000.00	23/01/2025
Merthyr Tydfil County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	24/01/2025
Police and Crime Commissioner for Merseyside	£5,000,000.00	24/01/2025
Surrey County Council	£5,000,000.00	27/01/2025
East Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	29/01/2025
Falkirk Council	£5,000,000.00	31/01/2025
London Borough of Waltham Forest Council	£5,000,000.00	31/01/2025
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	06/02/2025
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	14/02/2025
Bolton Metropolitan Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	14/02/2025
Monmouthshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	17/02/2025
Somerset Council	£5,000,000.00	17/02/2025
Fife Council	£5,000,000.00	18/02/2025

Cambridgeshire County Council	£3,000,000.00	24/03/2025
East Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	24/03/2025
High Peak Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	09/04/2025
London Borough of Newham Council	£5,000,000.00	11/04/2025
Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire	£5,000,000.00	14/04/2025
South Ayrshire Council	£5,000,000.00	17/04/2025
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	22/04/2025
Rushmoor Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	25/04/2025
Rushmoor Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	29/04/2025
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	30/04/2025
Rushmoor Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	06/05/2025
North Lanarkshire Council	£5,000,000.00	12/05/2025
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	13/05/2025
London Borough of Waltham Forest Council	£5,000,000.00	23/05/2025
London Borough of Waltham Forest Council	£5,000,000.00	23/05/2025
Darlington Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	29/05/2025
London Borough of Waltham Forest Council	£5,000,000.00	30/05/2025
Police and Crime Commissioner for Lancashire	£5,000,000.00	02/06/2025
Isle of Wight Council	£5,000,000.00	09/06/2025
Monmouthshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	10/06/2025
Plymouth City Council	£5,000,000.00	07/08/2025
West Dunbartonshire Council	£5,000,000.00	12/08/2025
North Lanarkshire Council	£5,000,000.00	12/08/2025
Gloucester City Council	£5,000,000.00	13/08/2025
Kirklees Council	£5,000,000.00	15/08/2025
Cambridgeshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	20/08/2025
South Tyneside Council	£5,000,000.00	20/08/2025
London Borough of Haringey Council	£5,000,000.00	22/08/2025
Derbyshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	26/08/2025
The Highland Council	£5,000,000.00	26/08/2025
Babergh District Council	£7,000,000.00	02/09/2025
Wrexham County Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	04/09/2025
Short Term Deposit Total	£361,000,000.00	
	Principal Deposited	Maturity Date
Counterparty		
North East Lincolnshire Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Worthing Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	21/11/2025
Great Yarmouth Borough Council	£5,000,000.00	22/04/2026
Derbyshire County Council	£5,000,000.00	25/08/2026
Kirklees Council	£5,000,000.00	22/01/2027
Kirklees Council	£5,000,000.00	17/03/2027
Long Term Deposit Total	£30,000,000.00	
Total Deposits	£391,000,000.00	

Money Market Funds

Counterparty	Balance at 30/09/24 (£)	Notice period
Aberdeen Liquidity Fund	18,000,000.00	Same day
Goldman Sachs Sterling Liquid Fund	0.00	Same day
Deutsche Sterling Liquid Fund	0.00	Same day
Federated Sterling Liquidity Funds	23,216,121.91	Same day
Legal & General Sterling Liquidity Fund	9,869,864.66	Same day
CCLA Public Sector Deposit Fund	628.61	Same day
J P Morgan Sterling Liquidity Fund	4,684.23	Same day
Morgan Stanley Sterling Liquid Fund	0.00	Same day
Total	51,091,299.41	

Notice / Call Accounts

Counterparty	Balance at 30/09/24 (£)	Notice period
Santander Call Account	27.75	Same day
Barclays Current	9,169.56	Same day
Handlesbanken	2,389.13	Same day
Total	9,435.44	

Strategic Bond Funds

Fund	Balance at 30/09/24 (£)	Notice period
Threadneedle strategic bond fund (income)	12,570,238.08	4 days
Threadneedle Global Equity Income Fund	17,035,972.74	4 days
Kames Diversified Income	9,632,489.77	4 days
Ninety One Diversified Income	9,077,726.35	4 days
M&G Strategic Corporate Bond Fund	11,383,112.89	4 days
Schroder Income Maximiser	11,431,596.17	4 days
CCLA Diversified Income Fund	4,919,057.72	4 days
Total	76,050,193.71	

Property Funds

Fund	Balance at 30/09/24 (£)	Notice period
CCLA Local Authorities Property Fund	22,810,481.27	Monthly
Total	22,810,481.27	

Divisions Affected – N/A

COUNTY COUNCIL

10 December 2024

Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

Report by Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

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

Executive Summary

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

Background

3. In July 2021 the Council agreed unanimously to refresh the Council's Scrutiny function by establishing that a broader set of overview and scrutiny committees be in place of the two existing overview and scrutiny committees. This was to enable a greater range and depth of scrutiny activity inclusive of a wider range of members of the Council.
4. Within the Council's Constitution at Part 6.2 paragraph 4 (viii) the scrutiny committees are given the right to submit an annual report. This is given effect through a Scrutiny Annual Report, and the attached report is the second to be published since Council's decision to refresh the Scrutiny function.
5. 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 was presented to Council in July 2024, detailing the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's activity. Consequently, that activity is not covered within this report. However, the Health Overview Scrutiny Committee annual report is hyperlinked 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

6. There are no financial implications associated with the formal receipt of the Scrutiny Annual Report.

Comments checked by: Drew Hodgson, Strategic Finance Business Partner

Legal Implications

7. 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.
8. 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.
9. 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.
10. 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: Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

Annex: Annex 1 – Scrutiny Annual Report 2023/24

Background papers: None

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

December 2024

December 2024

Scrutiny

annual report

2023/24



1 Introduction

The Overview and Scrutiny¹ function is principally responsible to two audiences. Whilst required by law it is nevertheless formally established by Council and remains accountable to elected members for its activity and contribution. However, it is a corporate governance function, which seeks to improve the decision-making of the Council and improve its service delivery. Having an impact on what the Council does, it also has an accountability towards residents, that its involvement in the

Council's processes makes a tangible improvement to their wellbeing. This report seeks to highlight what the Scrutiny function has done, put on record the contribution it has made, reflect on its performance and identify its principal areas of focus for future improvement.

The report covers the period July 2023 – June 2024 and not the municipal year. The reason for this is that typically the first meeting of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee will consider an agenda developed by the previous year's membership and, as such, that meeting reflects the issues and priorities of the earlier membership.

What is scrutiny?

At Oxfordshire County Council most major decisions in the Council 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. It is worth recognising at this point the changes during the year to the administration. At the start of this reporting period the administration was formed of an alliance of two political groups comprising three political parties: the Liberal Democrats, Labour and Co-operative and the Green Party. However, in late September 2023, the Labour and Co-operative group formally withdrew from the administration, and the Cabinet, leaving the Liberal Democrat-Green group to continue as a minority administration.

In operating an 'executive' (Cabinet) decision-making arrangement, the Council is required by law to have a 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 contribute to council decision-making. The 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 in formulation.

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 as to 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.

Background

In July 2021 the members of the Council agreed unanimously to refresh the Council's Scrutiny function by establishing a broader set of overview and scrutiny committees in place of the two existing overview and scrutiny committees. This was to enable a greater range and depth of scrutiny activity and to be inclusive of a wider range of members of the Council.

On 12 December 2023 the Council agreed to establish a new scrutiny committee: the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Until this point, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee had been responsible for education and young people, as well as adult social care. In financial terms, this meant one committee held responsibility for scrutinising around 70% of the Council's service budgets. Creating an additional committee afforded greater capacity to focus in on a high profile area of the Council's activity. The new committee held its first meeting on 18 January 2024.

Current shape

The Scrutiny function at Oxfordshire County Council technically has six Scrutiny Committees:

- Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- People Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny
- Horton Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny

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 Council in July 2024. This document can be read here:

<https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/documents/s71593/CC240709R10%20Annex%201%20OCC%20HOSC%20annual%20report%202024.pdf>

The Horton Joint Health 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.

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.

Each non-Health Committee comprises nine elected members – Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny also has co-opted members. The committees convene at least four times per year, with each having distinct remits:

- **Education and Young People:** all services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education (including Home to School Transport and Special Educational Needs and Disability), and support of families; the Council’s statutory functions in relation to children’s social care and safeguarding. This includes public health as they relate to children and young people where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee; matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children’s and adult services; the welfare of unaccompanied young asylum seekers; services for Young Carers.
- **Performance and Corporate Services:** Corporate and directorate performance; financial reporting; budget scrutiny.
- **People:** all services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to adults in potential need of social care; scrutiny of the Council’s statutory functions in relation to adult social care and safeguarding. Includes public health matters as they relate to adults where they are not covered by the Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- **Place:** Climate change, transport, highways, planning and place-based services including the delivery of regulatory services, fire and rescue, community safety and community services such as libraries.

Overview and Scrutiny function



Cllr Eddie Reeves (chair)
Performance and Corporate
Services Overview and
Scrutiny Committee



Cllr Kieron Mallon (chair)
Place Overview and Scrutiny
Committee (Till May 24)



Cllr Eddie Reeves (chair)
Education and Young People
(Till May 24)



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)
People Overview and Scrutiny
Committee



Cllr Liam Walker (chair)
Place Overview and Scrutiny
Committee (From May 24)



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)
Education and Young People
(From May 24)

Membership
Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair)
Cllr Brad Baines (vice-Chair to May 24)
Cllr Bob Johnston (vice-Chair from May 24)
Cllr Neil Fawcett (to Sept 23)
Cllr Donna Ford
Cllr Damian Haywood (to Sept 23 and from Jan 24)
Cllr Charlie Hicks (to Sept 23)
Cllr Kieron Mallon
Cllr Ian Middleton
Cllr Liz Brighouse (Nov to Dec 23)
Cllr Calum Miller (from Nov 23)
Cllr Glynis Phillips (from Nov 23)

Membership
Cllr Kieron Mallon (Chair to May 24)
Cllr Liam Walker (from Feb 24 and Chair from May 24)
Cllr Charlie Hicks (vice-Chair)
Cllr Andrew Coles (to Sept 23)
Cllr Arash Fatemian (to Sept 23)
Cllr Ted Fenton
Cllr Nathan Ley (to Sept 23)
Cllr Judy Roberts (to Sept 23)
Cllr Freddie van Mierlo
Cllr Yvonne Constance (to Feb 24)
Cllr Robin Bennett (from Dec 23)
Cllr Duncan Enright (from Dec 23)
Cllr Alison Rooke (Dec 23 only)
Cllr Nigel Simpson (from Apr 24)
Cllr Richard Webber (from Dec 23)

Membership
Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair til May 24)
Cllr Nigel Simpson (from May 24 and Chair from May 24)
Cllr Liz Brighouse (vice-Chair til May 24)
Cllr Jenny Hannaby vice (Chair from May 24)
Cllr Trish Elphinstone
Cllr Andy Graham
Cllr Sally Povolotsky
Cllr Roz Smith
Cllr Michael Waine
Cllr Ian Corkin (from May 24)
Fraser Long – Catholic representative co-optee
Ruth Bennie – Anglican representative co-optee (to Jan 24)
Toby Long – Anglican representative co-optee (from May 24)

Membership
Cllr Nigel Simpson (Chair)
Cllr Sally Povolotsky (vice-Chair til Nov 23 when left the committee)
Cllr Imade Edosomwan (vice-Chair from Jan 24)
Cllr Trish Elphinstone
Cllr Andy Graham
Cllr Nick Leverton
Cllr Bethia Thomas (to July 23)
Cllr Michael Waine
Cllr Liam Walker (to Oct 23)
Cllr Jenny Hannaby (from Sept 23)
Cllr Ian Corkin (from Nov 23)
Cllr Alison Rooke (from Nov 23)
Ruth Bennie Anglican school representative co-optee (to Oct 23)
Fraser Long Catholic school representative co-optee (to Oct 23)

2 Scrutiny in numbers

Number of meetings held

18

Number of substantive items considered

46

Working group reports

0

Number of recommendations made

74

Reports to cabinet

21

Members of the public, non-committee members involved

16

Cabinet response breakdown

(based on responses received at time of publication)

72% accepted

21% partially accepted

7% rejected

Though Scrutiny in numbers can tell us some information, 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 magic number for what constitutes 'success' in terms of Scrutiny recommendations to Cabinet. This number will always be significantly influenced 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 that:

- An average of approximately two and a half substantive items have been taken per meeting, which is slightly above but not far off the recommended optimum suggested by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny of two. This is a slight increase on the previous year, when the number was a little over two, indicating a growth in the number of items being considered at Committee.
- Scrutiny has sought to undertake more of its work through committee than working groups, having not submitted any working group reports.
- Every committee has met its constitutional responsibility of a minimum of four meetings per year, bar Education and Young People, which was established mid-way through the year.
- On average, just over one member of the public has attended each Scrutiny meeting. This does, however, represent a fall from the last year, where the number was closer to two.

- Nineteen reports and 74 recommendations indicate a consistent flow of ideas between Scrutiny and Cabinet. This represents an increase on the previous year's reports (17), but a reduction in the number of recommendations made (107). A fall in the number of recommendations per report is generally considered a good sign, indicating Scrutiny is learning to focus its recommendations.
- The ideas which Scrutiny puts forward are well-received by Cabinet, with around one in fifteen being rejected. In the previous year, the figure was approximately one in ten, further suggesting that Scrutiny may be becoming more selective in making recommendations.

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. If a call-in request is deemed valid, then the decision in question is held in abeyance and cannot be implemented until a special meeting of the relevant Scrutiny Committee is held. The Committee will hear both sides of the argument and decide whether or not to refer the decision back to the Cabinet or individual Cabinet member, or sometimes an officer in respect of any key decision delegated to them, with reasons why the decision should be re-considered. There were no call-ins during this reporting period. It is worthwhile noting that Scrutiny Officers have been contacted on more than one occasion by members of the public seeking to call-in decisions. Whilst Scrutiny remains a doorway for members of the public to access the Council and make their views heard, the Council's commitment to 'playing our part in a vibrant and participatory democracy' must remain within the space of operation defined for it within statute. As such, call-in remains an exclusively member-focused function.

3

Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

Councils of all political persuasions have faced acute challenges in developing the legally mandated balanced budgets in the light of constrained income and growing demand for statutory services. Oxfordshire is not immune to these pressures.



Cllr Eddie Reeves (chair)

Scrutiny of the Council's budget preparations and proposals is this committee's most important responsibility. To that end, different aspects of the budget have been taken through committee at half of the meetings this year. This has provided members with a solid platform to understand better the Council's future strategic aspirations, the changes planned to enable those aspirations, the risks involved, and the reliability of the assumptions on which they are based.

Budget scrutiny varies significantly across local government, with some Councils performing the task well and others, less so. Oxfordshire County Council has, during its current term, made great leaps forward in this regard and is beginning to do budget scrutiny well.

Budgetary challenges heavily shape the context of the Council's operations and activities, meaning the committee rarely has approached topics in which one or more financial challenges have not featured. However, budget-specific questions, particularly around the quantum of resources available, are not the sole determinants of the Council's performance; it is also vital that the Council successfully translates its ambitions from numbers on budget lines to tangible improvements for the residents of Oxfordshire and maximises the impact of the resources it has. Within the fast-changing environment in which it operates, the Council is having to make significant practical and operational changes, not least in its decision to vacate County Hall, which is a significant commercial property transaction in itself. The Committee has devoted particular focus therefore across multiple aspects of the Council's organisational change and transformation activity to provide challenge to the Council's proposals.

Similarly, whilst budgets largely determine the Council's headcount, supporting our valued employees to deliver better services to residents is about much more than money.

Better understanding how to retain and develop our staff over the long-term, how to keep them engaged and productive, and smarter approaches to recruitment surrounding hard-to-fill vacancies are all questions which, if not addressed correctly, pose a significant risk to the Council’s strategic ambitions. To that end, another key focus of the committee over the last year has been around the Council’s workforce.

I would like to pass my thanks on to all members of the committee for their hard work and contributions, noting the especial benefit to the committee of having several former Cabinet members among its number, including two from the current term.

Cllrs Leffman, Levy, and Ley have been the primary Cabinet members attending the committee over the last year and I would like to thank them on behalf of the committee for the openness and engagement throughout.

As intimated above, recognising the valuable contribution of the officers at the Council has been a key theme of the committee’s work this year. It would be remiss therefore of me to overlook their hard work in supporting the work of the committee and of the wider Council, in particular, the preparation of its budget. Special thanks go to Lorna Baxter and Kathy Wilcox in this regard.

I should also thank Ben Piper and Tom Hudson in Democratic Services for their superb support throughout.

Cllr Eddie Reeves, Chair of Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Membership

- Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair)
- Cllr Brad Baines (vice-Chair to May 24)
- Cllr Bob Johnston (vice-Chair from May 24)
- Cllr Neil Fawcett (to Sept 23)
- Cllr Donna Ford
- Cllr Damian Haywood (to Sept 23 and from Jan 24)
- Cllr Charlie Hicks (to Sept 23)
- Cllr Kieron Mallon
- Cllr Ian Middleton
- Cllr Liz Brighthouse (Nov to Dec 23)
- Cllr Calum Miller (from Nov 23)
- Cllr Glynis Phillips (from Nov 23)

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held 6	Reports to cabinet 10	Working group reports 0
Number of substantive items considered 20	Number of recommendations made 20	
	Members of the public, non-committee members involved 0	
Cabinet response breakdown* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 65% accepted • 20% partially accepted • 15% rejected 		
*(based on responses received at time of publication)		

Key areas of focus and achievements

Budget and strategic plan

Scrutiny of the Council's budget is challenging in that there is a huge amount of information to digest, but during the period of scrutiny the proposals remain provisional whilst further detail, such as the local government finance settlement from central government, remain unannounced. The uncertainty over extent of the changes between iterations of the budget and, just as importantly, where any necessary changes are proposed to be made makes it difficult to split consideration between meetings. The scrutiny of the budget and strategic plan, was extended this year to be considered over three meetings, half of the committee's annual total. The first meeting allowed for wider consideration of the general approach to budget savings, with detailed consideration of the entire budget as it stood in December 2023 whilst waiting for key information to be shared, and a final meeting in January 2024 focusing primarily on the changes proposed from the previous iteration.

Unusually, over the course of three meetings the committee did not make any recommendations. A recommendation in scrutiny is a proposal which requires a formal response by Cabinet. Nonetheless, Scrutiny provided over the course of the three meetings significant effort into understanding the Council's priorities and how it intends to deliver those priorities, assessing the adequacy of the financial resources dedicated to enabling those actions, testing the reasonableness of forecasts where there was uncertainty, and assessing the level of risk the Council's budget proposals involved. Ultimately, it made a total of 18 observations, which were issues for the Cabinet to consider, but did not require any formal response.

The committee's feedback traversed all levels of the budget, from specific areas of saving, where it felt the Council might be forfeiting too much in relation to customer services (for instance, responses to planning applications as the local flood authority), and under-appreciated individual risks, such as the impact of the McCloud judgement on future pension liabilities. Equally, it provided challenge at a directorate level, for example placing on record its concerns over the potential for operational impact if all savings were to be realised within children's social care. Corporate level plans, particularly around layering were subject to a number of prescient observations. The Committee raised a concern that front-loading layering into the first two years of the medium-term financial plan may raise the risk of redundancies. Finally, some of the key strategic issues faced by the Council lie outside of its control, for example the statutory override for the High Needs Block which allows the Council to hold this expenditure off-balance. Nevertheless, it is important that the Council be cognisant of such issues and be preparing for their impacts, which the committee sought to ensure occurred.

The report arising from the committee's budget scrutiny process stated that it had three intentions: i) to provide to Cabinet the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee's response to the budget proposals prior to deciding the details of the budget to be proposed at Council for ratification; ii) to inform members of Council of the issues identified by the Scrutiny Committee; iii) to provide assurance to the public that amidst the difficult decisions which need to be made, that robust challenge as to the outcomes and assumptions has been provided. Notwithstanding the lack of formal recommendations, it is considered that these objectives were met. The familiarity with the issues by all members provided by the budget scrutiny process was clearly an important factor in helping members to inform their decisions.

Business Change and Transformation

As referenced by the Chair in his introduction, the Council is undergoing significant business change and transformation. This is partially driven by financial imperatives, though not solely. Changing work practices and the move to hybrid working has significantly changed the Council's requirements for physical space. Likewise, taking opportunities to reflect on whether there are ways of doing core business in a more effective way is an ongoing driver. With very significant changes going on to the way the Council is working, Performance Overview and Scrutiny has been heavily engaged with these issues. The move from County Hall, and other activities around realising the value of under-utilised assets have been looked at via reports on the Council's Capital Asset Disposal Strategy and City Centre Accommodation Strategy. The key steer from the committee was a wish for the Council to have greater clarity about its ambitions and desired outcomes from asset disposals. It is legitimate to see maximal income, used to underpin Council services as the primary aim of asset disposals. Equally, the Council may wish where permissible to forfeit some of its income to support wider social value and benefit. Whichever option is pursued to achieve that outcome the Council must be clear, and it is this clarity the committee has consistently pushed for in terms of how it approaches asset disposals, including County Hall.

Across the country there are many instances of failed IT projects. The Council's decision whether to switch from its current business services system was considered twice during the reporting period. The Committee is pleased to see that the Council's ultimate decision reflected the concerns expressed over the degree of risk and doubts over whether there was sufficient resource to invest to make sure any switchover was successful.

The Council is also seeking to become more commercial, and it is expected that a reasonable assessment of increases to income could be between 3 and 8% through improvements through commercialisation. The Committee has engaged with this approach and generally supports it, though the suggestions were at an early a stage and were not scrutinised in depth. One area flagged by the committee, however, was the need to factor in governance and oversight processes which reflected both the Council's risk exposure, and also the legal vehicle used to deliver any commercial plans. The Committee is expected to receive an update on this activity in November 2024.

Staffing

The ability of the Council to recruit and retain staff is a key strategic risk to its ambitions. Failure to recruit to hard-to-fill posts, for example in children's social care where there are national shortages of vital staff, has a knock on in terms of the Council's performance, including in areas where there exist statutory benchmarks. Widespread failure to recruit to permanent positions means that to avoid a reduction in performance the Council must take on interim staff, whose cost to the Council is greater than the cost for equivalent permanent staff. Local knowledge and understanding, and working relationships with other key partners are soft skills which are developed over time. Whilst their impact is hard to quantify, it is easy to see when they are absent; challenges become harder to overcome and more missteps may be made. Such skills are only developed over time, meaning a constant turnover of staff after a short period means these soft skills do not have the chance to develop. The time investment of recruiting and inducting staff is significant. A high turnover of staff means the Council is using resources to maintain the current position instead of being able to use those resources to achieve its ambitions.

Consequently the committee has invested significant time to ensure that the Council's plans to recruit and retain the staff it requires are sound. To this end, the committee has commissioned papers on or reviewed existing work around the Council's draft Workforce Strategy, Workforce Report, Employee Engagement Survey, Equality Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan (though not solely employee focused, it has large elements which are), and the progress of the Council's Delivering the Future Together programme.

Three key outputs arose from these reports, the first simply being a number of practical areas the committee asked the Council to prioritise, for example clarifying expectations around working hours in the more flexible and fluid context of hybrid working, and taking steps to improve psychological safety of staff to allow upwards challenge without fear of recrimination.

The largest number of recommendations made concerned data, ensuring that the Council was collecting the right information to allow it to make informed decisions about its performance, and its subsequent actions. Multiple recommendations were made to allow fuller contextual understanding of the data collected, with long-term trend data, the addition of comparators and the identification of key demographic groupings whose specific needs were not able to be looked at because they were not suitably categorised, for example part-time workers.

Finally, one aspect of Oxfordshire is its strong military connection. The Council has recognised this through signing up to the Armed Forces Covenant. Regular relocation and the impacts of deployment mean that armed forces families face specific challenges in accessing work, particularly work at their level of experience. The Committee learned that some of the specific interventions the Council has in place to mitigate the challenges faced by service personnel had lapsed to a degree, making a number of recommendations as to how this important work could be revitalised.

Cost of living

The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee requested a report on the Council's cost of living support during the most acute phase of the cost of living crisis. At that meeting, it was recognised that it would be necessary to transition from emergency support to more preventative activity. During the reporting period, therefore, the committee heard a follow-up report to consider how the Council was pivoting towards a more preventative approach.

Understanding poverty – its different forms, its locations, and its manifestations in different contexts – is vital to develop longer-term preventative interventions. The majority of the committee's inputs concerned steps on how to improve the breadth and granularity of the information in the poverty dashboard under development by officers. Whilst these may seem low-key recommendations, the work of understanding where poverty is and what it looks like is foundational to the Council's intended future work around community wealth building.

Social Value

Despite being one of the largest employers in the county, the extent of the Council's responsibilities – for instance, social care and highways – mean that it is an outsized procurer of these goods and services, a so-called 'anchor institution'. As part of its duties under the Social Value Act 2012, the Cabinet agreed a Social Value Policy in early 2022 stating how it would give weighting within its procurement practices to undertakings which were of social, not directly financial, in nature. The committee reviewed its first-year progress following the release of its annual report.

The overriding feedback was that securing nearly one million pounds of socially valuable activity was very welcome. However, to maximise the benefits of the policy it was necessary for the Council to be more targeted in its application. Specifically, it made recommendations to encourage the Council to find out whether bespoke measures of social value could be applied, and that the Council should clarify the outcomes it most wishes to see and the plan for achieving those. Unfortunately, the suggestion put forward by the committee in relation to the measures it would recognise, adopting measures from Wales about Future Generations, is not legally permissible. However, clarity on the way forward and the Council's intended objectives remains both possible and desirable.

Customer (Resident) Experience

In a large and complex organisation such as the Council, which interacts directly or indirectly with residents on a daily basis across its services and areas of responsibility, it is to be expected that there will be variations in the level of resident satisfaction. The draft Customer Experience Strategy, considered by the committee, was devised to 'level up' user experience by learning from the high performing areas to drive improvements across the less responsive ones.

Unfortunately, this is one of the reports for which recommendations have not been responded to at the time of publication. However, the committee hopes that if the vision of the strategy is to 'put the customer at the heart of our service delivery' then the committee's recommendations about building the strategy around public perceptions of 'the Council' to improve service levels by sub-contractors and to find ways of supporting those approaching the Council with enquiries relating to district/city council issues, will have been listened to.

4 Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

I enjoyed chairing this Committee and would like to take this opportunity to thank all those officers and Cabinet members who appeared before it. With the political changes, there were then changes of portfolio holder and changes of membership to the Committee. However, there was some consistency in that Cllr Hicks as Deputy Chair and I, and the Committee as a whole, received support from the same Scrutiny Officer for the whole year. I am delighted to have finally been able to say that.

Amongst the changes to the membership of the Committee, we have seen previous members move to Cabinet posts but I would like to acknowledge Richard Webber's service on the Committee. His resignation from the Committee and from the Council in May 2024 on health grounds meant that the Council lost a dedicated public servant and we wish him well. In a similar vein, I would like to pay tribute to the contribution of Yvonne Constance and her public service on this committee.

The Committee has looked at a range of items across the year and, from roads and safety to football and libraries, the items considered have been ones that will have a tangible impact on residents and their day to day lives. It is tempting for councillors to place too many items on their work programmes and to achieve very little in what can become "talking shops". I hope we have guarded against that in our activity on Place and I am grateful to my fellow Committee members for working with me to do so.

Cllr Kieron Mallon, Chair of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee to May 2024.



Cllr Kieron Mallon (chair)

Membership

Cllr Kieron Mallon (Chair to May 24)
 Cllr Liam Walker (from Feb 24 and Chair from May 24)
 Cllr Charlie Hicks (vice-Chair)
 Cllr Andrew Coles (to Sept 23)
 Cllr Arash Fatemian (to Sept 23)
 Cllr Ted Fenton
 Cllr Nathan Ley (to Sept 23)
 Cllr Judy Roberts (to Sept 23)
 Cllr Freddie van Mierlo
 Cllr Yvonne Constance (to Feb 24)
 Cllr Robin Bennett (from Dec 23)
 Cllr Duncan Enright (from Dec 23)
 Cllr Alison Rooke (Dec 23 only)
 Cllr Nigel Simpson (from Apr 24)
 Cllr Richard Webber (from Dec 23)

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held

4

Reports to cabinet

5

Working group reports

0

Number of substantive items considered

9

Number of recommendations made

37

Members of the public, non-committee members involved

5

Cabinet response breakdown*

- **76% accepted**
- **21% partially accepted**
- **3% rejected**

*(based on responses received at time of publication)

Key areas of focus and achievements

The committee's key outcomes include its important contribution in providing assurance to the public of the probity of the Council's decision making in a matter of significant public interest, namely whether to sell Council-owned land to Oxford United Football Club. Another crucial area, particularly within times of such financial pressure, has been to consider the effectiveness of the Council's access to the contributions made by developers to support the infrastructure of the homes they are building, known as s. 106 contributions. Finally, it is always encouraging to see that Scrutiny is in line with wider Council thinking, particularly pressing how much latent value there is in the way we use data. This corresponds with the Council's action in making significant investment in recruiting and running data apprenticeships from amongst its existing employees to improve the Council's use of its data. These apprenticeships began in September 2024.

Oxford United Football Club (OUFC)

Unusually for Scrutiny, by necessity, the committee considered the report relating to the proposed sale of land to OUFC as an exempt item the ahead of the Cabinet's consideration of the same report at its meeting the following week.

The proposal to build a new stadium on the Triangle site in Kidlington had garnered high levels of support from the public but there were also high levels of opposition. The Committee's role was not to agree whether or not the stadium should be built but, rather, to consider whether the correct process had been followed, whether a case had been made for sale or for leasehold, and whether the seven strategic priorities had been adequately assessed.

The Committee was satisfied that the engagement process had been thorough and extensive. The Committee considered that the process had been fair and equitable with officers making sound assessments.

The Committee was satisfied that it was evident that the club was unable to remain at The Kassam Stadium after June 2026.

It made two recommendations to Cabinet: firstly, that Cabinet should fully understand the short-, medium- and long-term impacts of covenants proposed and, secondly, that it should pay particular attention to whether freehold or leasehold was most appropriate, were it to agree to the proposal. Cabinet accepted both these recommendations and, whilst the officer recommendation had been to agree to proceed with a freehold sale, Cabinet decided to agree to a leasehold disposal subject to a number of conditions.

Whilst the Committee had no view on the merits or otherwise of the proposal itself, it was pleased that its close scrutiny had an impact on the Cabinet decision-making.

Money – Infrastructure Funding Statement

The Infrastructure Funding Statement came to the Committee in December 2023 prior to consideration by Cabinet. This retrospective look at developer contributions secured, spent, or received during the previous financial year caused concern amongst members at the number of barriers and constraints around expenditure of s.106 moneys. There are inevitably restrictions but the Committee was keen to encourage the Council to build as much flexibility as possible into its agreements so that the money received could actually be used for things that were needed.

It was clear that the process for the delivery of infrastructure was complex. Needs are identified often far in advance of when they are to be delivered, sometimes many years, and can involve multiple independent parties each delivering part only. These needs and the relevant sums for infrastructure delivery are usually tightly defined by developers, providing little flexibility to adjust provision as needs alter over time.

This level of complexity and uncertainty makes it challenging to understand where a project stands, and therefore whether it is on track. The more difficult it is to monitor projects, the more likely delivery slips, which ultimately means residents miss out on the infrastructure they need.

This was a concern for the Committee, and it was pleased to be assured that the Council was reviewing its current contracts to identify at what point each project was, and what degree of flexibility the Council held. The Council was also examining how it might improve its whole s.106 process, from negotiation to delivery. This too was strongly welcomed.

On that occasion, the Committee made a total of ten recommendations which focused on two broad areas: maximising the benefits of available infrastructure funding for residents as well as supporting the realisation of the Council's strategic ambitions around transport.

The Council started a sprint piece of work into the matter and the Committee received an update in April 2024. The Committee was reminded that the Council had highly effective processes for negotiating and securing development contributions in place but that the expenditure of these funds in a timely fashion was more challenging.

The report received by the Committee noted that some funds had been "held for over 20 years without any movement other than accruing of interest." This was of concern to the Committee who highlighted this in its recommendations to Cabinet. 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.

Data and roads – HGVs and Vision Zero

Scrutiny playing a role in policy development is, of course, a key part of its function and, whilst this can be done informally in task and finish groups, there is also the opportunity for doing so in Committee. The Committee was asked to provide comment on the proposed approach to the management of Heavy Goods Vehicle (HGV) issues in Oxfordshire. A quickly implemented, county-wide Area Weight Restriction Strategy had not been deemed practical by the Council despite its initial intention when adopting the Freight and Logistics Strategy in 2022.

The Committee called for the Council to review its data infrastructure to ensure that it could be easily reviewed and monitored. Engagement with Traffic Advisory Committees and with local members in developing a viable strategy that will work for individual communities as well as for the county as a whole was key.

Questions of traffic and roads came to the fore again when the Committee scrutinised the draft Vision Zero and Action Plan. The importance of close working with Thames Valley Police to achieve anything close to the Council's ambitions was highlighted by the Committee and, whilst outside this reporting cycle, was also emphasised when the Committee met the Police and Crime Commissioner and the Chief Constable a few months later. Again, the Committee reminded the officers of the importance of data driving the approach with infrastructure projects being implemented based on evidence. It also sought to break down some of the data for the public's benefit so that they could see more readily why Vision Zero was so important and what the action plan could achieve.

The Circular Economy

The Circular Economy Strategy and Action Plan came to the Committee in its development stages. This was intended to “go ‘beyond waste’” and focussed not only on reducing waste and emissions but also sought to provide wider benefits for residents, for communities, for the economy, and for the environment.

Four recommendations were submitted to Cabinet: two were about clarifying information and improving communication, one about ensuring that the strategy resulted in reduced costs, and the fourth about working with neighbouring authorities for cross-border use at Household Waste and Recycling Centres for the benefit of residents.

Publicity and Libraries

Having scrutinised the plans before the Libraries and Heritage Strategy was launched, the Committee received an update on it in December 2023. The Committee commended the clarity of the report and an infographic providing usage figures across what was then Cultural Services was particularly well-received. The Committee called for more publicity: whilst mobile libraries are unlikely to return, the Council’s Home Library Service would be of great value to many people who are currently unaware of it. There was also a call to work with partner organisations to ensure that people are aware of the support and facilities available in libraries.

5 Education and Young People

Chair's introduction

It was a privilege to be elected to chair the Education and Young People Committee. The Council rightly recognised that greater attention to, and capacity for, scrutiny of children's services was necessary. I should like to thank Cllr Reeves for his work in Chairing this committee from the off, and the members of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their previous work. I hope that the Education and Young Peoples Committee develops into an effective committee.

Special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) was a feature at the first two meetings of the Committee during this period and it is a crucially important topic. There is a keenness by members across the Council to play their part in ensuring that the necessary improvements are made. The Committee will also have the capacity to consider other matters going forward and it looks forward to doing so.

I take this opportunity to thank members and officers for attending the Committee and also those members of the public who have addressed the Committee. They have provided valuable insight from their lived experience.

Cllr Nigel Simpson, current Chair of the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)

Membership

- Cllr Eddie Reeves (Chair til May 24)
- Cllr Nigel Simpson (from May 24 and Chair from May 24)
- Cllr Liz Brighthouse (vice-Chair til May 24)
- Cllr Jenny Hannaby vice-Chair from May 24)
- Cllr Trish Elphinstone
- Cllr Andy Graham
- Cllr Sally Povolotsky
- Cllr Roz Smith
- Cllr Michael Waine
- Cllr Ian Corkin (from May 24)
- Fraser Long – Catholic representative co-optee
- Ruth Bennie – Anglican representative co-optee (to Jan 24)
- Toby Long – Anglican representative co-optee (from May 24)

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held 2	Reports to cabinet 1	Working group reports 0
Number of substantive items considered 4	Number of recommendations made 2	
	Members of the public, non-committee members involved 5	
Cabinet response breakdown* <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 50% accepted • 0% partially accepted • 50% rejected <small>*(based on responses received at time of publication)</small>		

Key areas of focus and achievements

Established shortly after the publication of the Priority Action Plan (PAP), the Committee requested updates on it at both meetings. The Committee is acutely aware that Education and Young People's services cover more than SEND. However, members across the Council are keen to ensure that there is robust monitoring of improvements.

One issue raised in Committee was about the newly-established improvement board's apparent lack of transparency and the Committee suggested that members of it should sit on groups within the Governance and Accountability structures which would enable them to act as envoys and to avoid wasted procedural time reporting back to the Committee.

The update report in January 2024 addressed various actions within the PAP and the Committee was advised that, whilst it was a key document, the transformation programme relating to it was to implement and embed a fundamentally transformative approach, around schools, Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), specialist provision, and with pathways into employment. There were some areas where action could be taken immediately but it was important to ensure that any changes implemented were sustainable and that they would deliver better outcomes. It was this that would lead to increased confidence on the part of parents and carers as well as on the part of children and young people. Levels of trust and confidence would be surveyed and monitored on a regular basis.

The Committee was keen that the seeming absence of the voice of young people from the PAP should be remedied. It was explained to the Committee that there were plans to improve some aspects of the PAP's language, particularly to amplify the voice of children and young people but also to make some actions tighter so that it would be clearer where targets were being achieved.

It was emphasised that the work arising from the PAP was not simply a response to the Local Area SEND Inspection, although it arose from that. Instead, it was seeking to ensure that issues that had arisen and developed over a number of years were remedied. Whilst recognising that some issues were negative, the Committee was reminded that there was also a great deal of excellent work happening and that this work would be publicised too. A commitment to openness and transparency demanded the sharing of all work whether good or less so.

The Committee received a further update in May and established that the Department for Education was satisfied that appropriate progress had been made.

The programme governance arrangements were fully established and a SEND Transformation Roadmap had been recently published in line with a commitment given. The SEND Improvement and Assurance Board had representation from across the Local Area Partnership and had received reports. The Committee was pleased to hear that the SEND Youth Forum was to be revamped and noted that, whilst there had already been groups engaging with young people, their work had not necessarily been publicised widely enough.

The second meeting of the Committee in this reporting cycle also saw reports on Inspecting Local Authority Children's Services (ILACS) and on validated examinations data in the county. The ILACS report had been published with Ofsted having judged the council's children's services as 'Good' across all five areas of inspection criteria, namely:

1. Overall effectiveness.
2. Impact of leaders on social work practice with children and families.
3. Experiences and progress of children who need help and protection.
4. Experiences and progress of children in care.
5. Experiences and progress of care leavers.

This was the first formal inspection since 2018. The Committee established that the Council was working on an action plan which it needed to submit to show how it would address the four areas highlighted in the report.

To improve the quality of direct work with disabled children in care, the Committee heard that the service would ensure that, in every statutory review, there was supervision from the independent reviewing officer and actions were taken to help each child comprehend why they were not being looked after by their families.

For disabled children, this would involve exploring different methods of communication with them. The service needed to ensure that this work was clearly evidenced in every child's case file. The Deputy Director emphasised that, whilst appropriate work had been undertaken, it had not always been evidenced. It was this that needed improvement.

The Committee established that, to support work demonstrating areas of improvement within the action plan relating to participation and engagement, CoramBAAF, a leading UK organisation for adoption, fostering and kinship care, had been asked to lead a survey of all children in care about their experiences in care to provide focus on areas of strength and areas for improvement. Case audits were being undertaken where every family had the opportunity to engage with the service and talk about their experiences including what else could be done to support them. These audits included the views of young people.

The validated exams data was received by the Committee. In order for it to have been more useful, the Committee would have preferred greater granularity of data.. It noted that, whilst there were positives, it was of concern that Oxfordshire's disadvantaged children and black and minority ethnic children performed less well than their national counterparts.

With 95% of Oxfordshire schools being rated either Good or Outstanding by Ofsted, it was suggested that most Oxfordshire schools were performing well in meeting the needs of most children in their community. The data was not gathered and formulated specifically to look at the performance of individual schools and was not divided between maintained and academy schools. Members of the Committee have been keen to explore educational data in detail and intended to do so in the next reporting cycle.

6 People Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chair's introduction

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has sought to work in a positive cross-party manner in its scrutiny of children's and adult's services. I believe we have achieved that and I am grateful to members. It would have been easy for members to criticise at times but I am strongly of the view that it is better to try and work together to improve things rather than to complain about what might have been.

I am very grateful to Cllr Povolotsky for her tireless work as Deputy Chair of the Committee and to Cllr Edosomwan for taking up the reins after she left the Committee. I would like to thank all those members who sat on the Committee for their focus and dedication to help the Council improve services for the good of residents.

Although we should not be complacent and there is always room for improvement, this year there has been a greater level of openness, transparency, and engagement with our committee which has made our scrutiny more effective.

Children's social care and Safeguarding were scrutinised by the Committee as, too, was Homelessness. A close eye has been kept on Adult Social Care and the Committee is pleased at the continued success of the Oxfordshire Way. It was positive for the Committee to be able to submit a recommendation to Cabinet recognising that the Oxfordshire Way is a success and should be celebrated.

SEND was, of course, the issue that attracted headlines and to which the Committee paid a great deal of attention with no apology for doing so. We hope very much that the improvements we have started to see continue and that children, young people, and families feel the effects of those improvements. Having recommended the creation of a committee dedicated to education and young people, the Committee was delighted when it was established and wishes it well.

Cllr Nigel Simpson, Chair of People Overview and Scrutiny Committee.



Cllr Nigel Simpson (chair)

Membership

Cllr Nigel Simpson (Chair)

Cllr Sally Povolotsky (vice-Chair til Nov 23 when left the committee)

Cllr Imade Edosomwan (vice-Chair from Jan 24)

Cllr Trish Elphinstone

Cllr Andy Graham

Cllr Nick Leverton

Cllr Bethia Thomas (to July 23)

Cllr Michael Waine

Cllr Liam Walker (to Oct 23)

Cllr Jenny Hannaby (from Sept 23)

Cllr Ian Corkin (from Nov 23)

Cllr Alison Rooke (from Nov 23)

Ruth Bennie - Anglican school representative co-optee (to Oct 23)

Fraser Long - Catholic school representative co-optee (to Oct 23)

Activity in brief

Number of meetings held 6	Reports to cabinet 3	Working group reports 0
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Number of substantive items considered 13	Number of recommendations made 15
	Members of the public, non-committee members involved 6

Cabinet response breakdown*

- **73% accepted**
- **27% partially accepted**
- **0% rejected**

*(based on responses received at time of publication)

Key areas of focus and achievements

Committee work

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee began the reporting year by considering a report on children's social care placement sufficiency as well as market management and fostering. The Committee was pleased that the Council had committed to reducing the number of Children We Care For as part of a commitment to ensuring that such measures were taken as a last resort and in the best interest of the child.

Safeguarding

The annual reports of the Safeguarding Adults Board and of the Safeguarding Children's Boards were received by the Committee and the meeting dedicated to them was an example of the overview aspect of the Scrutiny function. Members looked in detail at the reports and explored what lay behind the headlines.

The request for a report on Homelessness and Rough Sleeping had arisen from consideration of an earlier Adults Safeguarding Board report. The Committee established that as a County Council, the Council had no statutory duty to look after homeless people. However, the Council had a long history of working with its partners to provide services that did so. There is a Prevention of Homelessness Directors Group which is made up of various partners, including the Council, the district and city councils, and the NHS. This had produced a comprehensive action plan with seven key strands.

The Committee was reminded that homelessness was a complex issue not least because the majority of homeless people are adults with capacity to make decisions that could be considered unwise. The system-wide response in Oxfordshire had sought to tackle this complexity whilst recognising that there are no easy solutions.

The collaborative process between the partners enabled support to be offered to individuals who did not fall solely under one service area. Relevant data about an individual was shared between services so that professionals had a clear understanding of their needs. The Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB) identified cases to ensure that the lessons shared across organisations were being acted upon and were resulting in the expected improvements.

The Committee commended the clarity of the report and commended the evident trust between partners which was of benefit to those they sought to support.

Adult social care

In April 2024, the Committee received a report setting out the Council's preparations for the Care Quality Commission (CQC) Assurance visit and the development of a self-assessment for Adult Social Care. It also provided an update on the recent Local Government Association (LGA) Peer Challenge.

Since the introduction of the Health and Care Act 2022, CQC had a duty to assess how local authorities met their Care Act 2014 duties against the published guidance and assessment framework. Upon notification of an inspection there would be three weeks to submit data requested in the Local Authority Information Return (LAIR). This enabled CQC to review key documents, information, and data in advance of its arrival. CQC would arrive for an on-site assessment within six months. CQC focused on four key themes: i) working with people, ii) providing support, iii) how the local authority ensures safety within the system, iv) leadership.

The LGA Peer Challenge had provided data on these key themes and a wide range of evidence for the LAIR. The peer review included 250 people with a range of experience from frontline workers to senior leaders throughout the organisation.

The LGA Peer Challenge identified several strengths within the Oxfordshire Adult Social Care System including improvements in waiting list times, the outcomes-focused Safeguarding Adults Board, and the passion and pride of staff but the review highlighted areas for development including the need to further embed an understanding of the Oxfordshire Way into staff culture, to develop work done around co-production, and to improve the data and intelligence dynamic.

The draft Digital Inclusion Action Plan was scrutinised in September and arose from the Digital Inclusion Strategy which was considered by the Committee previously.

The action plan was a work in progress which was to be overseen by the Digital Inclusion Working Group but was a cross-council initiative which needed to be factored in to everyone's thinking. The Committee agreed with the then Cabinet member that it was important for the Council to be encouraging digital inclusion whilst being acutely aware of the potential for digital exclusion.

The success of the Oxfordshire Way has been seen in the strong performance of the Adult Social Care directorate throughout the year. The Committee has monitored and scrutinised the service but was acutely aware that the narrative around adult social care nationally is often negative owing to pressures and difficulties faced by individual councils, in contrast to the Council's own successes. The Committee was pleased to establish that the positive changes had not been the result of additional staff but, rather, a focused attention to detail with frontline staff following the Oxfordshire Way to ensure all opportunities to support service users had been fully explored.

Very often, national news items relating to adult social care are reported through a lens of negativity. There are challenges in Oxfordshire and there are opportunities for further improvement but the situation here is far more positive than the national picture might indicate. The Oxfordshire Way is a good news story and is one which residents should know more about, as well as also being able to inform the national conversation around Adult Social Care.

Education and SEND

The October 2023 meeting of the Committee was the last one where it considered education. It received the Oxfordshire Education Commission's report and members thanked the Commission for a clear, well-written, comprehensive report bringing together strands of work which had been undertaken over a number of years. There was a need for collaborative work across the Council to address the issues raised by the Commission. The data was broadly the same as that in reports from the former Education Scrutiny Committee which had made very similar recommendations in 2020 but members considered that there had been little discernible action.

Members perceived that the Committee had not properly engaged with education since the establishment of the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee and that Scrutiny would benefit greatly from the restoration of a committee dedicated to education. The Committee was therefore very pleased by the establishment of the Education and Young People Committee by Council in December 2023.

The People Overview and Scrutiny Committee was keen to encourage the Council to develop long-term sustainable plans which ensured key stakeholders worked together for the benefit of the county's children and young people and made several recommendations to Cabinet in this respect.

This meeting was also the Committee's first opportunity to review the report after the Local Area Partnership SEND Inspection and to consider the indicative action plan development process and proposed governance arrangements.

The Committee was pleased to hear an unequivocal acceptance of the report and the apologies made on the Council's behalf and of the resolve and commitment to rapid and systemic improvement. The Committee welcomed the openness to scrutiny.

The Committee heard, and noted in the Ofsted report, that "[l]eaders openly acknowledge the urgent need for a 'reset' to repair the fractured relationships with parents and carers and other stakeholders." The Committee agreed that was essential. The Committee also heard a commitment to improving culture. The poor communication cited in the report had hindered the building of successful relationships and an element of restorative thinking and of building new successful partnerships with families and with other stakeholders was key. The Committee considered that this should include a commitment to co-production and a preparedness to engage with suggestions made by those who did not necessarily have an official relationship with the Council but did have positive contributions to make.

Timely, clear, and charitable communication would be essential and the Committee was pleased to hear of the quality assurance work being undertaken in the area of responses to complaints.

In addition to the remit of the Committee the fact that the inspection was into the Local Area Partnership meant that there were elements of Scrutiny work that fell into the Oxfordshire Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee's (HOSC) remit. The Committee was keen to consider how it could work with HOSC more effectively. At that time, HOSC had considered the report and focused on the health aspects with the Committee considering education and the Council's provision. The Committee subsequently made seven recommendations to Cabinet which were identical to those of HOSC.

7 Other Areas of Work

Business management and monitoring (BMMR) staffing/staff turnover

In the previous reporting period, regular meetings were held with Chairs and Deputy-Chairs to provide an opportunity to ask questions about the Council's Business Management and Monitoring performance in relation to its key performance indicators, finance and risk. As these meetings were not held in public there was no scrutiny held in public. Now at each committee meeting the latest BMMR report is submitted as part of the work-programming item, informing all members in public about the Council's performance and facilitating the Committee's forward planning.

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 and/or all-member briefings on:

- Street Design Guide
- Poverty Mapping Dashboard
- Advice Centres

8 Reflections and Future Ambitions

In Scrutiny’s Annual Report for 2022–2023, the following areas were identified as requiring additional focus in 2023–2024: staffing, the balance between committees, organisational culture, the integration of Scrutiny into the Council’s operation, public engagement and added value.

Staffing

The 2022–2023 report highlighted the challenges of delivering an effective Scrutiny function reliant on interim staff. Following the restructure of the Law and Governance service, two new permanent employees were successfully recruited. The team has been fully staffed over the year. With this greater capacity the function has been able to undertake its expanded role (detailed below), and it hopes to provide greater input into integrating Scrutiny into the Council’s decision-making processes.

Committee balance

The 2022–2023 report highlighted the challenges of having one committee, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee, being responsible for providing Scrutiny for approximately 70% of the Council’s service spend, especially given that within its remit was an area of particular overspend: Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND). As detailed in the background section above, the Council established a new Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12 December 2023, and held its first meeting on 18 January 2024.

The formation of this committee has allowed more detailed focus on educational matters whilst keeping an ongoing eye on the improvement of the Council’s SEND performance.

Though the formation of the additional committee has created additional capacity it remains necessary to keep under review the balance of committees to ensure scrutiny time is focused where it needs to be.

Corporate culture

In April 2024 the then Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities issued updated statutory guidance on overview and scrutiny. This updated guidance reiterated that successful scrutiny is a shared endeavour within Councils and relies on a strong organisational culture: ‘The prevailing organisational culture, behaviours and attitudes of an authority will largely determine whether its scrutiny function succeeds or fails.’

The previous annual report recognised the challenges to developing a positive scrutiny culture in an organisation which had undergone change at both a political and senior officer level. A clear corporate vision has been established and a culture of cross-council working with embedded Scrutiny.

The establishment of a corporate culture which is supportive and enabling of scrutiny is a constant journey and the Council has further to go. A key expectation of a Council which has a strongly pro-scrutiny culture across the organisation is that it will consistently meet its legal obligations towards the scrutiny function. Cabinet members may be required to attend a scrutiny meeting to answer questions and the Cabinet is required to respond to recommendations received from Scrutiny within two months of receipt of them.

These legal requirements have not been consistently met. For example, although responses have been submitted to the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee only 20% have been made within two months of receipt from the Committee. This is an area where officers will need to work with the Cabinet to ensure that the timeliness of response is improved.

The attendance of relevant Cabinet members at scrutiny meetings enables the committee's work. If the lead member is not present a substitute Cabinet member has typically attended, although this is not generally as effective as having the lead member present. The Scrutiny function highlights with particular concern the non-attendance by the Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care at four of six meetings over the course of the reporting period (two relating to People Overview and Scrutiny, and two relating to the budget scrutiny).

The Scrutiny statutory guidance states that 'while each request for information should be judged on its individual merits, authorities should adopt a default position of sharing the information they hold, on request, with scrutiny committee members.' It should be noted that there has been an improvement over the reporting period in relation to access to information although securing requested information has not always been timely or easy and again this should be a focus for improvement.

Integration

Whilst Scrutiny is a forum which provides challenge to the Council, it is a 'critical friend' which seeks to help the Council raise standards and improve the lives of local residents. To do so, it must be embedded as a core part of the Council's decision-making process and delivery. As in other areas, there has been progress made over the course of this year: the level of communication, particularly between Chairs and senior officers, has improved markedly, along with the degree of collaboration.

Recommendations to Cabinet are the way Scrutiny can convey how it would see improvements to the Council's services or proposals so. A failure to respond to some scrutiny recommendations, or to respond in a consistently timely fashion, is not symptomatic of a system in which scrutiny's suggestions are engaged with meaningfully or thought given to how the issues they raise might be addressed.

An area of focus for the coming year for the Scrutiny function is to develop a better sense of not only whether formal responses have been made to Scrutiny recommendations, but also how thorough the Cabinet is at following through on actions it has agreed to undertake. Replying to a recommendation is a necessary step, but unless those actions the Cabinet commits to as part of its response are delivered then the value of the suggestion is not realised.

Public engagement

One of the functions of scrutiny is to be an access point for members of the public who find it difficult to reach the key decision-makers of the Council. The number of members of the public attending Scrutiny meetings, therefore, is an important metric in its success. Good scrutiny will be looking at issues the public care about. It is of some disappointment, therefore, that the number of members of the public attending scrutiny over the last year has fallen from 28 to 21, despite the rise in the number of meetings.

One potential issue, which the scrutiny function would like to see reviewed as part of a Constitution Review, is the rule that prevents members of the public from attending multiple committees to make an address on the same matter.

Scrutiny seeks to inform its work through co-opted members, and the newly-formed Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee has been designed with the potential for up to six co-opted members. As required under legislation, it has successfully found representatives of Catholic and Anglican educational establishments.

Legislation also determines that the Council must seek to co-opt parent governors from maintained schools within the county. As is the case nation-wide and historically at the County Council, the regulated and inflexible process for recruiting such co-opted members was undertaken as required, but was unsuccessful. Scrutiny will continue to fulfil its legislative duties with further attempts to fill these roles. Finally, a common adage of good practice in social care is ‘no discussion about me, without me’. As a consequence, Scrutiny is working to identify co-optees to the committee who are young people. The potential for working with vulnerable young people, and the safeguards entailed, have meant that this process has not been quick. However, work is underway to ensure that the voice of young people is represented on the committee.

A further area relating to public engagement undertaken by the scrutiny function over the last year is the introduction of feedback forms from those attending. As the sample this year is small and therefore not representative analysis of feedback will be considered as part of the 2024–2025 Annual Report.

Added value

Scrutiny has an importance in creating cross-party consensus. To do so, members of the Cabinet should be willing to engage and listen to the suggestions coming from scrutiny and scrutiny members should be willing to commit to sharing their insights fully.

One aspect of improvement for Scrutiny to focus on in the coming year, is to undertake a working group deep-dive. Working groups with more time to spend on matters tend to be the source of Scrutiny’s most reasoned and useful recommendations.

Overall reflections

It is the nature of scrutiny to focus on areas of improvement meaning that it can be easy to lose sight of the positive strides made. Equally, it is important to recognise that there remains work to do, as highlighted in detail above if the Council is to become an exemplar of how to do scrutiny well.

9 Thanks

As has been emphasised throughout this report, Scrutiny is a multi-party enterprise. Its successes and contributions are the result of the time and effort given by many people – Scrutiny members, Cabinet members, Directors, Scrutiny Officers, report-writers, front-line staff, external contributors, stakeholders and members of the public. The Chairs of the Scrutiny Committees would like to put on record their appreciation to all those who have contributed towards the shared endeavour of enabling a Council decision-making process which, ultimately, seeks to deliver the best possible outcomes for its residents, current and future.

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.

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Tom Hudson,
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Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Richard Doney,
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Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee and People Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Omid Nouri,
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Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Ben Piper,
Democratic Services Officer

Supporting all Scrutiny Committees

FULL COUNCIL

10 December 2024

APPRAISAL PROCESS FOR THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (HEAD OF PAID SERVICE)

Report of the Director of HR and Cultural Change

RECOMMENDATION

The Council is **RECOMMENDED** to:

- a) Approve the proposed changes to the appraisal process for the Chief Executive (Head of the Paid Service) as set out by the South East Employers (SEE) review report (Annex 2).
- b) Delegate authority to the Remuneration Committee to constitute the Appraisal Panel and undertake the appraisals for the Chief Executive.
- c) Approve amendments to the Constitution to include acting as an Appraisal Panel and undertaking Chief Executive's appraisals to the terms of reference to Remuneration Committee at Part 5.1C and to delegate to the Director of Law and Governance and the Monitoring Officer to make any consequential amendments to the Constitution.

Background

There is a need to change the approach to the appraisal process for the Chief Executive (Head of the Paid Service) at the Council. This matter was reported on at the Remuneration Committee that took place on 4 November 2024 and the recommendations in this report are those which were endorsed by the Remuneration Committee for Council approval.

The need for this change is set out as follows:

1. Whilst there is no legal obligation for Councils to undertake appraisals for officers or Chief Officers, this is widely believed to be a positive and vital element of performance management, bringing a wide range of benefits to the Council.
2. The Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022 (relevant sections of which are appended as Annex 1) states 'It is a contractual obligation on the part of both the chief executive and the employing council to engage in a regular process of appraisal.' (Annex 1, p 2). The Handbook also includes 'Joint guidance on appraisal of the chief officer' (Annex 1, p 2-3), which outlines the key elements of the appraisal process for the Chief Executive (Head of the Paid Service).

3. The current Chief Executive was appointed by the Council on 13 December 2022 and assumed office on 1 March 2023. In the months following his appointment, the current Chief Executive engaged the political leadership and HR officers in a discussion on arrangements for his appraisal. This highlighted a gap in the policy and procedure for the Chief Executive appraisals within the Council.
4. An appraisal process was constructed in early 2024 and involved the current Chief Executive undertaking three meetings with the Leader and Deputy leader (joint meeting), the Conservative and Independent Alliance Group leader and the Labour and Cooperative Group leader. An observation following this was that whilst it was positive, there was still room for improvement in the process.
5. The Director of HR and Cultural Change commissioned the CEO of South East Employers (SEE), an organisation that the Council is a member of, to undertake a review of the approach so as to make recommendations for improvement. SEE undertook this review as part of the membership subscription the Council has with SEE. The excerpts from the report outlining the findings of the review and recommendations for changes is attached (Annex 2).

Summary of findings of the review by South East Employers (Annex 2)

- 5.1. The review included semi-structured interviews with all those concerned in the process including the Chief Executive, and there was an overall agreement that an improved process was required.
- 5.2. While there is no legal obligation for councils to run appraisals, there is a contractual obligation to conduct annual the Chief Executive appraisals.
- 5.3. The review found that, as the Chief Executive serves the whole council, the responsibility for appraising the Chief Executive sits with senior elected members, and the Council can decide who should be involved. The Leader may choose to invite the opposition groups to be involved formally as part of the overall process or by providing input into the evaluation aspects of the appraisal (Annex 4, excerpts from relevant documents, including Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022).
- 5.4. **Summary of the recommendations by SEE for Oxfordshire County Council (Annex 2)**

5.4.1. Agree the preferred model for the Chief Executive appraisal
- Use of Remuneration Committee is the recommended approach.

5.4.2 Develop and agree the Chief Executive appraisal policy - it is intended that as part of the services provided by SEE, they will draft the Chief Executive appraisal policy.

5.4.3. Develop and agree the Chief Executive appraisal procedure and processes - the proposed process is outlined in Annex 3.

5.4.4. Implement an appraisal training / coaching programme - all members who are likely to undertake appraisals must be trained. Consideration should also be given to providing new members additional support through coaching to develop their skills and effectiveness as an appraiser.

5.4.5. Agree evidence collection approaches - evidence and feedback to support the appraisal. It is proposed that 360-degree feedback is gathered as part of the Chief Executive appraisal and built into the procedure for the appraisal cycle.

5.4.6. Questioning – provide support to Councillors to structure their questioning to focus on performance.

Timelines for the next appraisal cycle

6. It is proposed that the updated Chief Executive appraisal process commences in December 2024.

Financial Implications

7. The appraisal facilitation as well as policy development are included in the Council's membership of SEE. The 360-degrees feedback and appraisal training for panel members would carry some small additional costs which will be met from existing budgets. Details are set out in Annex 3.

Comments checked by:

Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources / S151 Officer (Deputy Chief Executive) Lorna.Baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

8. There are no direct legal implications arising from this report. However, there are contractual obligations – i.e. as specified in the Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022 (Annex 1), there is an obligation on both parties (the Council and the Chief Executive) to ensure that appraisal is completed. The recommendations, if approved and implemented, will help ensure that those obligations are met.

Comments checked by:

Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer,
Paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Risk Management

9. There are no risk management issues arising from this report.

Sustainability Implications

10. There are no sustainability Implications arising from this report.

Consultations

11. The report has been consulted with Remuneration Committee on 4 November 2024.

Staff Implications

12. The proposed changes are in line with the terms and conditions as outlined in The Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022, the existing contractual document. The proposed changes only affect the Chief Executive (Head of Paid service).

Equality & Inclusion Implications

13. It is believed that, if the proposed changes were to be implemented, they would result in a better representation in the appraisal process leading to improved inclusion.

CHERIE CUTHBERTSON

Director of HR and Cultural Change

- Annex 1: Excerpts from Joint Negotiating Committee for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022
- Annex 2: Recommendations from the Report by South East Employers SEE
- Annex 3: SEE THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE (HEAD OF THE PAID SERVICE) Appraisals service brochure including process map
- Annex 4: SEE Excerpts from relevant documents including JNC for Local Authority Chief Executives National salary framework & conditions of service handbook dated 7 September 2022

Contact Officer: Katrina Pennington, HR Business partner

29 November 2024

4. PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

This guidance is intended for use by senior elected members and the chief executive when agreeing a process for appraising the performance of the chief executive. The focus of this process should be on clarifying what the chief executive is expected to achieve and on identifying any continuing development needs which, if met, would maintain a high level of performance. The process of setting objectives should be by agreement and the result should be to identify objectives which are relevant and challenging but achievable. The LGA, Regional Employers' Organisations, ALACE and SOLACE are potential sources of advice and assistance. Guidance is attached at **Appendix 2**.

(page 5)

JOINT GUIDANCE ON APPRAISAL OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This guidance is intended for use by senior elected members and the chief executive when agreeing a process for appraising the performance of the chief executive. The focus of this process should be on clarifying what the chief executive is expected to achieve and on identifying any continuing developmental needs which, if met, would maintain a high level of performance. The process of setting objectives should be by agreement and the result should be to identify objectives which are relevant and challenging but achievable.
- 1.2 The process should not become complex. At all times it needs to focus clearly on a few basic issues: what the chief executive's job is; what has been done well; what could have been done better; the major issues over the next year; and what developmental needs the process clearly identifies.

2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR APPRAISAL

- 2.1 The responsibility for appraising the chief executive lies with senior elected members. It is a contractual obligation on the part of both the chief executive and the employing council to engage in a regular process of appraisal.
- 2.2 It will be for local decision in the light of local circumstances whether the appraisal should be carried out by a small committee representing all political groups or by a senior representative or representatives of the controlling group. Whichever approach is adopted, those conducting the appraisal need to bear in mind at all times that the chief executive is employed by the council as a whole, not by the controlling group, and is therefore required to serve all of the council.

3. AIMS OF APPRAISAL

- To identify and clarify the key objectives, priorities and targets of the council and appropriate timescales for their achievement over the next (e.g. twelve) months
- Agree what the chief executive should personally achieve over the next (e.g. twelve) months and identify required standards of performance, in order to deliver the council's key objectives, priorities and targets. Wherever possible standards of performance should be expressed in ways which can be monitored objectively
- Discuss positive achievements over the past (e.g. twelve) months and identify reasons for good performance

- Discuss instances over the past (e.g. twelve) months where targets have not been met, identifying the factors preventing the achievements of agreed goals
- Discuss developmental requirements. The chief executive will have strengths and weaknesses and the parties should identify the professional development necessary to equip the chief executive with the requisite skills to meet the council's objectives. The parties should be proactive and anticipate future developmental needs in the context of the council's changing priorities. This discussion could lead to the design of a formal programme of continuous professional development (CPD). Equally this discussion may lead to agreement on changes to the working relationship between leading members and the chief executive. It should not be assumed that it is only the chief executive who may need to adjust his / her approach to the working relationship

3.1 Appraisal should be set in the context of the council's objectives, priorities and targets, generally expressed in corporate plans. Appraisal targets when taken as a whole should be related to agreed targets for the council as a whole.

4. THE APPRAISAL CYCLE

4.1 Appraisal should take place on a predetermined date, **at least annually**, backed up by regular monitoring meetings at which targets can be reviewed for continuing relevance. A formal system of appraisal should not prevent the continuous review of progress and performance.

5. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

- Continuous two-way monitoring of performance against objectives
- Preparation for an appraisal interview
- An appraisal interview where recent and current performance, future objectives and development needs are discussed
- Agreement on action required from either party to ensure required performance is achievable
- A continuing process of informal discussion regarding performance

6. The appraisal interview and afterwards

- Both parties should be well informed and prepared for the interview
- The process should be two-way
- The interview should be free from interruptions, and notes should be taken when necessary

- Discuss instances over the past (e.g. twelve) months where targets have not been met, identifying the factors preventing the achievements of agreed goals
- Discuss developmental requirements. The chief executive will have strengths and weaknesses and the parties should identify the professional development necessary to equip the chief executive with the requisite skills to meet the council's objectives. The parties should be proactive and anticipate future developmental needs in the context of the council's changing priorities. This discussion could lead to the design of a formal programme of continuous professional development (CPD). Equally this discussion may lead to agreement on changes to the working relationship between leading members and the chief executive. It should not be assumed that it is only the chief executive who may need to adjust his / her approach to the working relationship

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- An appraisal interview where recent and current performance, future objectives and development needs are discussed
- Agreement on action required from either party to ensure required performance is achievable
- A continuing process of informal discussion regarding performance

6. The appraisal interview and afterwards

- Both parties should be well informed and prepared for the interview
- The process should be two-way
- The interview should be free from interruptions, and notes should be taken when necessary

- The parties should concentrate as far as possible on established facts rather than unsubstantiated opinions
- Targets which are realistic and capable of being monitored should be agreed
- Any agreed personal development plans should be implemented within the agreed timescale
- The chief executive should be given a reasonable opportunity to correct any shortfalls in performance
- A date for the next review should be agreed

7. EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

- 7.1 External assistance in facilitating the appraisal process can be helpful in providing an independent perspective.
- 7.2 Within the local government 'family', it may be sought from the Local Government Association or by contacting the [Employers' Secretary](#) or from the appropriate Regional Employers' Organisation or [ALACE](#) or [SOLACE](#). Alternatively, such assistance may be available from commercial sources, such as consultancy firms.
- 7.3 Such assistance from the aforementioned organisations may take the form of them either directly participating in the process for which a fee may be requested to cover staff time or the recommendation of, for example, a suitably experienced recently retired senior officer or other independent individual.

Note: If external assistance is sought, it must have the agreement of both sides.

8. OTHER MATTERS

- 8.1 The detailed content of appraisal interviews should normally be treated as confidential to the participants, unless both parties agree that it would be helpful for the targets agreed for the ensuing period to be shared more widely. However, it may be useful to report to an appropriate committee meeting that an appraisal interview has taken place.
- 8.2 This may be useful in acting as a reminder that the chief executive and members need to ensure that chief officers are in their turn appraised.
- 8.3 It should, however, not be assumed that the process for appraising the chief executive should be followed in precise detail for other staff. There is a fundamental difference between elected members appraising the chief executive and managers appraising subordinates. The principles, nevertheless, are the same.

(pages 18-20)

Annex 2



The approach to the appraisal of the Chief Executive Officer is fundamental to setting the tone for the political and executive relationships in the organisation and for enabling the Chief Executive to set the direction for all officers and service departments.

MODELS FOR CHIEF EXECUTIVE APPRAISALS

There are three broad models to consider in agreeing the approach to conduct CEX appraisals. There are advantages and disadvantages of all and some suit the political context of a Council better than others.

The process utilised in Oxfordshire County Council in 2024 suggested a form of leaders of political groups was being pursued.

The models are illustrated below.

Leader and Chief Executive	Panel of leaders of political groups	Panel of members of an Remuneration / Appointment Committee
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Simple model, easy to organise.• Can work well politically stable areas where there is a consistent history of the same party forming the administration.• Can be challenging in Councils where there is no overall control.• Can disenfranchise the opposition parties.• If political leadership changes opposition parties are unsighted on the process and objectives.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Often used in Councils of no overall control.• Requires preparation and management to avoid the appraisal being used to debate political differences.• Needs a strong chair to maintain focus on the appraisal and not on broader political considerations.• Does not engage backbench Councillors and so Group leaders need to engage their groups.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• A stable model, where expertise in appraisals can be developed.• Can engage backbench councillors as well as group leaders.• Requires pre-preparation to avoid the appraisal being used to debate political differences.• Needs a strong chair to maintain focus on the appraisal and not on broader political considerations.• High risk and less effective if the Leader of the Council is not part of the committee.



5. Recommendations

1. **Agree the preferred model for the Chief Executive appraisal.**

As set out in section 4 there are three broad options or models to consider. It is not recommended that the Leader / Chief Executive model is pursued due to the context of Oxfordshire being in no overall control and having a coalition administration. The two feasible models are to pursue the group leaders' approach or an approach which sees the Remuneration (Appointments) Committee (REMCO) used. The majority favoured an approach where appraisal was a responsibility of REMCO and built into their terms of reference.

The use of REMCO would lead to a stable system for the appraisal, would tie in backbench input and has the advantage that the Council Leader and opposition leader both serve on this Committee.

2. **Develop and agree the CEX appraisal policy.**

Ensuring the policy has longevity and survives changes in administrations and Chief Executives, through embedding the policy in the terms of reference for the Committee, as agreed by the Constitution is important.

If the preferred model is to use REMCO, the policy should make provision for the Leader to be part of the panel, should a situation arise in future where the Leader was not part of the REMCO.

The policy should also set the requirement for any Councillor undertaking the appraisal to be appropriately trained and supported.

The policy could include the option to use an independent facilitator if required. The scope of independent support could include supporting the pre-preparation activities of the appraisal panel, the preparation of the Chief Executive, and facilitation and note production following the meeting. Whilst this may not be required, including this as an option enables it to be used if required. [Independent support can be useful if Chief Executive does not wish a Council officer to be party to the discussion or to take the notes of the meeting].

3. **Develop and agree the CEX appraisal procedure and processes.**

Set out the procedures to include the timeline, the requirements of the pre-preparation stage, including any 360-degree appraisal or pulse surveys, and any templates and / or documentation to be used.



4. Implement an appraisal training / coaching programme.

All members who are likely to undertake appraisals must be trained. Consideration should also be given to providing new members additional support through coaching to develop their skills and effectiveness as an appraiser. This support could be limited to the first year or two of conducting appraisals, until Councillors have gained experience and become more proficient as an appraiser.

5. Agree evidence collection approaches.

Evidence and feedback to support the appraisal e.g. via 360-degree appraisal, pulse surveys, and or targeted research is considered and agreed approaches are set out and built into the procedure for the appraisal cycle. It is not recommended full 360-degree appraisal with the same individuals is conducted every year but that on a rotational basis, feedback is collated from a range of internal officers, Cabinet Members, Backbenchers and external partners and stakeholders.

6. Questioning - Utilise internal or external independent support in the first few years to support Councillors to structure their questioning to focus on performance, to avoid straying into the minutiae of detail or the risk of the meeting '*descending into rabbit holes*'.

Question suggested by one Councillor included:

- The architecture of SMT and its effectiveness.
- Future challenges facing Local Government and horizon scanning - what this means for Oxfordshire to feed the CEX objectives.
- Balance of how CEX is spending his time and how this needs to change in view of the changes in local government predicted.
- The CEX views of how the Council can punch at its weight in Whitehall, and how the Council performs linked to comparator councils.
- CEX aspirations for place.
- Effectiveness of the organisation, resourcing, availability of people etc.

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CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER APPRAISAL SERVICE

Your SEE Membership includes the facilitation of an annual Chief Executive appraisal, supporting an open dialogue on performance, development needs and positive working relationships between Chief Officers and Elected Members. This service is delivered by the Chief Executive and Directors of South East Employers.

PURPOSE OF THE APPRAISAL?

The appraisal is one of many on-going discussions that should take place on personal performance and the performance of the Authority generally. The annual appraisal is the formal annual mechanism to review performance, as required in the Chief Officer Terms and Conditions.



To **clarify and agree the key objectives**, priorities and targets of the local authority and the timescales for their achievement.



To **agree what the Chief Executive should personally achieve** over the next 12 months and potentially beyond, in furtherance of the authority's objectives and any additional standards of performance, expressed in ways that can be monitored objectively.



Discuss developmental requirements. Like any employee, the Chief Executive will be facing new challenges and have development needs to be successful year after year. The appraisal process should discuss the professional development required to equip the Chief Executive with the skills and capabilities to meet the local authority's objectives.



Discuss positive achievements over the past 6-12 months and explore reasons for good performance.



Discuss instances over the past 6-12 months where **targets have not been met**, exploring any factors adversely affecting the achievement of agreed goals.

TYPES OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE APPRAISAL



LEADER AND CHIEF EXECUTIVE

- Simple model
- Works well in majority stable political councils
- Can be challenging in councils where there is no overall control

PANEL OF LEADERS OR POLITICAL GROUPS

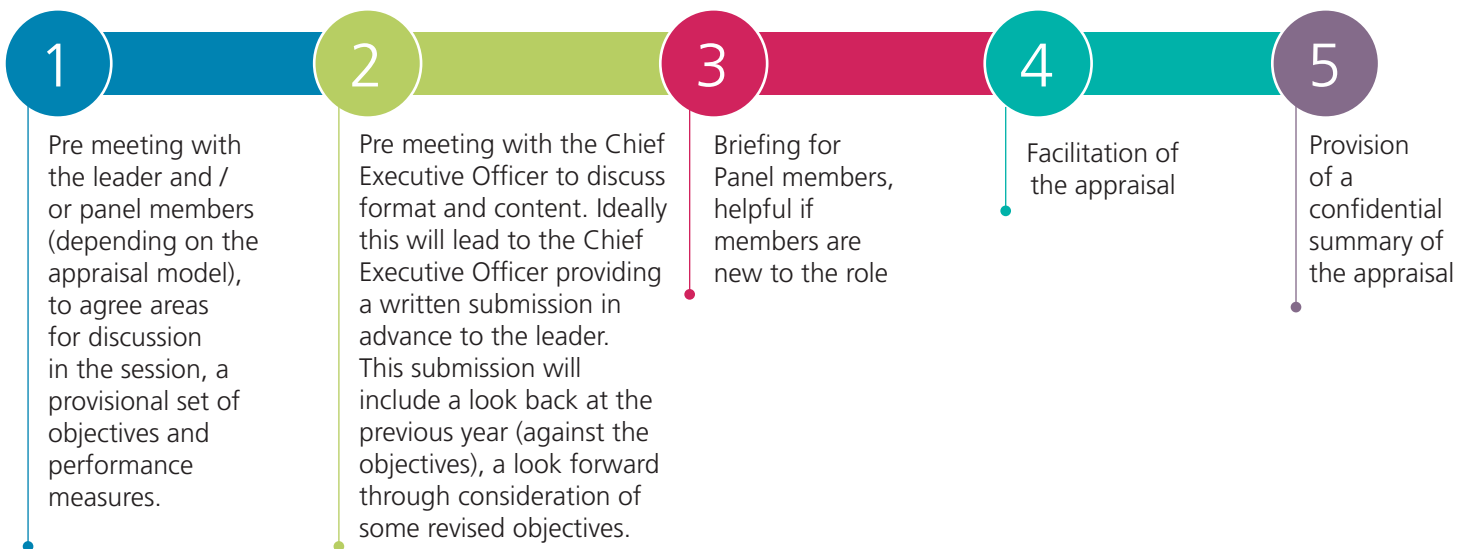
- Often used in councils of no overall control
- Requires prep and management to avoid the appraisal being used to debate political difference
- Needs a strong chair

PANEL OF MEMBERS OF A DESIGNATED COMMITTEE

- A stable model, expertise in appraisals can be developed
- Used across different political administrations
- Requires pre-prep, if the Leader is not part of the panel
- Needs a strong chair

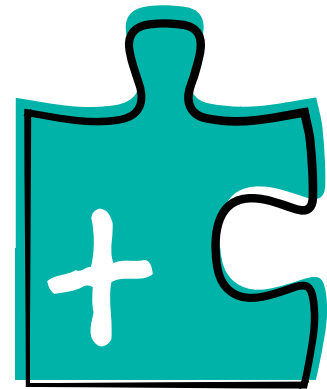
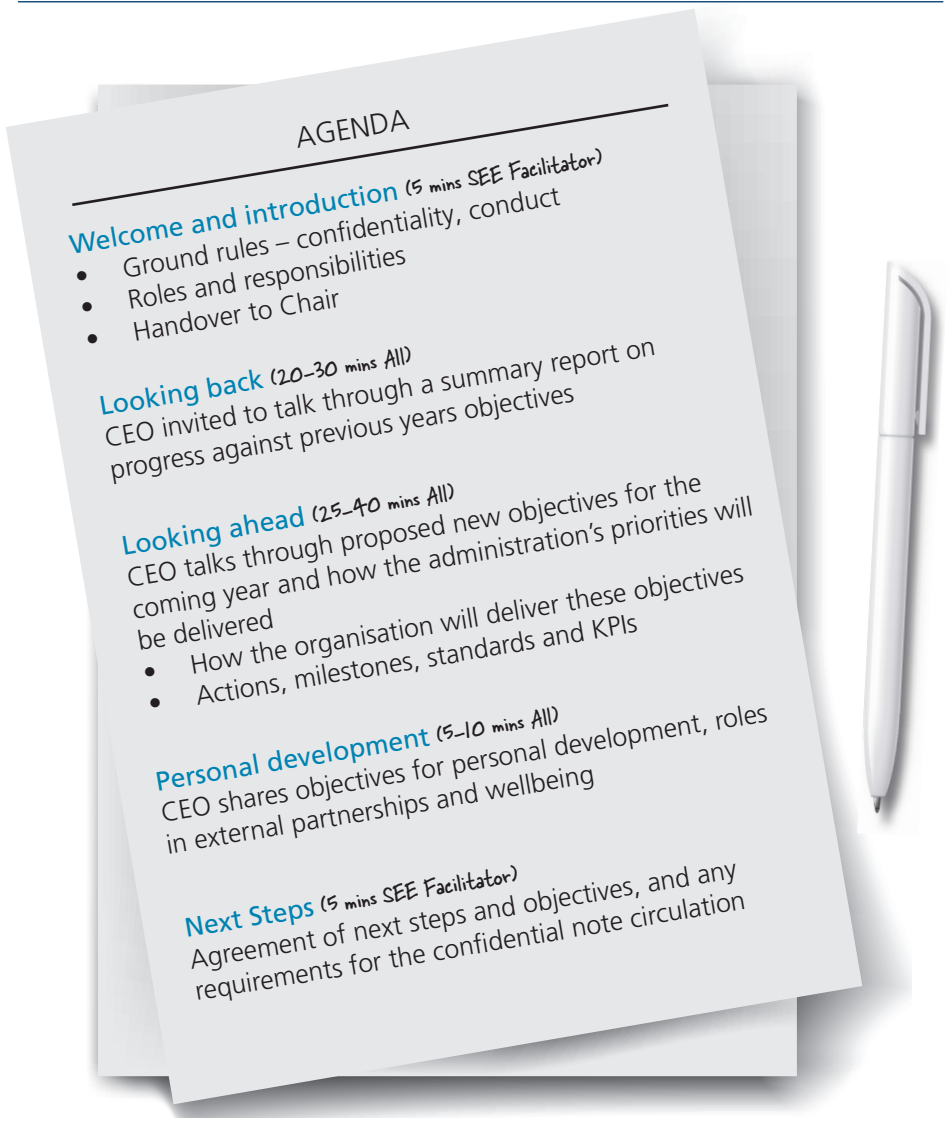
All models follow the same broad format and operate in broadly the same way. The primary difference is the inclusion of meetings with panel members independently and then collectively prior to the appraisal.

THE APPRAISAL PROCESS



WHAT	TIME	DURATION	PURPOSE
CEO meeting with SEE Facilitator	3-4 weeks prior to the appraisal	30 minutes	To discuss the format of the pre-submission and consider any areas for discussion.
CEO submits pre-appraisal submission	2 weeks prior to the appraisal	N/A	Appraisal submission, including the look back and potential new objectives
Meeting with either the leader and or panel members	To be agreed - suggested 1-3 weeks prior to appraisal	30 mins per Leader / Member	To consider any areas for discussion and the proposed objectives and submission from the CEO
The appraisal meeting	N/A	60-90 minutes	
Draft Notes	Up to 2 weeks after the appraisal		Draft notes sent to CEO for amendment CEO notes circulated to leader / panel Final notes agreed and circulated.

PROPOSED AGENDA (IDEALLY 90 MINUTES SESSION)



ADDITIONAL ENHANCEMENTS

The appraisal process outlined is included as an integral part of membership of SEE.

If required, this can be supplemented with the following:

NEW PANEL MEMBER WORKSHOP

A brief on-line CEO appraisal workshop can be delivered for new members of an appraisal panel. This workshop considers roles and responsibilities, the format of the appraisal, the purpose, tools and techniques for a successful appraisal etc.

Price £700 plus VAT

These enhancements, if required, will extend the overall timescales by a further 3 - 4 weeks, to enable the review and / or interviews.

360 DEGREE REVIEW

Utilising agreed lines of enquiry linked to the capabilities required of a high performing executive SEE can facilitate a fully managed 360-degree process. This is delivered via an on-line survey and can include direct reports and their reportees, Councillors, stakeholders and other partners. A confidential report and feedback is provided to the CEO to support the appraisal discussions.

Price: £750 plus VAT

FEEDBACK INTERVIEWS

In order to gain specific insights and feedback a senior SEE facilitator will conduct a series of phone or teams interviews with up to 8 external / internal stakeholders. The review will be against a core set of agreed criteria, agreed with the CEO and Leader. The feedback will be triangulated with other information sources maintaining confidentiality and non-attributable comments. An anonymous report of feedback will be provided alongside strengths and areas for development.

Price £1,200 plus VAT

SEE FACILITATOR

As your Regional Employers' Organisation, SEE understands the need for high levels of confidentiality in the delivery of an appraisal process, hence this is an integral part of your membership. The appraisal process will be facilitated by the SEE Chief Executive or a member of the SEE Senior Leadership Team, who are all experienced professionals.



Dr Ruth Adams

CHIEF EXECUTIVE

Ruth is an experienced executive working at Chief Executive and Deputy Chief Executive levels for SEE and for a large authority. She is an organisational development expert. Ruth leads the majority of SEE appraisal facilitation and is experienced in working with CEOs, Leaders and Councillors.



Clare O'Connor

DIRECTOR: HUMAN RESOURCES & EMPLOYMENT RELATIONS

Clare is an experienced HR Executive working with senior leadership teams in both public and private organisations. She has led the development and delivery of performance management frameworks. Clare is experienced in working with CEOs and political leaders, and supporting Chief Executive appraisals.



Jennifer McNeill

DIRECTOR

Jennifer was formerly our Regional Director and continues working with SEE to provide specialist advice and support. Areas of expertise include; Chief Executive appraisals; mediation and conflict resolution. Jennifer is a specialist national mediator leading mediation between politicians and Chief Executives.

NEXT STEPS

We invite the Leader and Chief Executive Officer to confirm their requirements for the SEE facilitated appraisal support.

WHAT WE NEED TO KNOW?

- The format of the appraisal, eg. Leader model, Group Leader model, designated Appointments or Remuneration Committee model.
- The preferred dates for the appraisal and pre-meets – this will enable us to develop a pre-appraisal timetable and agree the SEE Facilitator.
- Appraisal enhancements – any training, 360 degree or interviews required.

This appraisal facilitation is an integral part of membership, however if pre-agreed meetings are cancelled at very short notice, it may be necessary for SEE to charge a cancellation fee.

ANNEX 4

Proposed approach to the appraisal of the CEO and excerpt from the JNC handbook

Guidance Note to support the Chief Executive Appraisal Process

1. Background

This guidance note provides advice on the appraisal of the Chief Executive and reflects that of The Joint Negotiating Committee (JNC) for Chief Executives of Local Authorities, the national body for the pay and conditions of service of Chief Executives. This is commonly referred to as The Chief Executive Handbook.

The Chief Executive Handbook provides advice for both senior elected members and the Chief Executive on how the appraisal process should be conducted. The extract from the handbook is provided at Appendices 1 and 2 for completeness.

2. Scope of Guidance

This guidance and process applies to the Chief Executive only.

This guidance is intended for use by senior elected members and the Chief Executive when agreeing a process for appraising the performance of the Chief Executive.

3. Introduction

The Chief Executive, as head of paid service serves the whole council: not just the leading group. The responsibility for appraising the Chief Executive sits with senior elected members. Appraisal is a contractual obligation on the part of both the Chief Executive and the Council.

The Council can decide who should be involved in the appraisal of the Chief Executive. The Leader may choose to invite the opposition groups to be involved formally as part of the overall process or by providing some input into the evaluation aspects of the appraisal.

Appraisals form the basis of an objective assessment of individual performance over time. The process provides a link to management objectives and council strategy, providing time to reflect and reset.

The focus of the appraisal process should be free from complexity. At all times, the appraisal should focus on what the Chief Executive's job is; what has been done well; what could have been done better, the major issues over the next year; and what developmental needs the process identifies. The process of setting objectives should be by agreement and the result should be to identify objectives which are relevant and challenging, but achievable.

4. The Appraisal Cycle

Appraisals should take place not less than annually, with many organisations choosing to hold the appraisal meeting in March/April each year based on agreed corporate priorities, followed by a 6-month review in early Autumn/October.

The appraisal cycle should be supported by regular monitoring meetings taking place at which objectives can be reviewed and considered for continuing relevance, and progress and performance can be considered and monitored. A formal system of appraisal should not prevent the continuous review of progress and performance and the basis of any robust and successful appraisal process must always be one of 'no surprises'.

5. The role of an independent facilitator

The engagement of an independent facilitator is highly recommended and good practice to help facilitate the appraisal process, providing impartial advice to both parties.

The Local Government Association, Regional Employers (South East Employers), SOLACE and ALACE can suggest and provide suitable independent facilitators to support the appraisal process. The commercial sector is also likely to be able to provide suitable facilitators also.

The role of the facilitator involves meeting with the appraisal panel to agree the key areas to be discussed at the appraisal meeting and who is to be involved. The facilitator will share and explore key areas with the Chief Executive taking a critical friend approach.

The facilitator will provide support at the appraisal meeting and will prepare a draft summary of the appraisal discussion including action points and review dates.

The independent facilitator can also help both parties to arrange 360 feedback from internal and external stakeholders. The LGA has a well-established 360 framework and an example report is attached at Appendix 2 for information purposes only.

6. Preparation for the Appraisal process

To conduct the appraisal process effectively, good preparation is essential, and it is expected that the appraisal meeting will be set well in advance to allow all parties to prepare effectively. Both parties should be well informed and prepared for the appraisal meeting.

Documentation from previous appraisals should be reviewed and any information supporting the achievement of objectives should be gathered. Both parties should consider:

Looking Back

- What has been done well?
- What might have been done better?
- Evidence and rationale?

Looking Forward

- What might objectives for next year be?
- Has the Chief Executive got the skills to achieve these?
- What can/needs to be developed and how?

7. The Appraisal Meeting

- The appraisal meeting should build on the interim discussions that have already taken place
- Papers for use at the meeting will be circulated in advance
- An agenda will be set for the meeting and allow sufficient time for the meeting
- The venue and the meeting should be free of interruptions or departures
- The Leader will chair the meeting and encourage participation from those present
- The meeting should be a two-way discussion
- Avoid surprises
- The parties should concentrate as far as possible on established facts rather than unsubstantiated opinions
- The Chief Executive should be given a reasonable opportunity to correct any shortfalls in performance.
- Objectives and targets should be set which are specific, measurable, achievable, realistic and timebound (SMART) with timescales for achievement over the next 12 months
- Any agreed developmental plans should be implemented within the agreed timescale
- A date for the next review should be agreed

8. Record Keeping and Reporting

The detailed content of appraisal meetings should normally be treated as confidential to the participants, unless both parties agree that it would be helpful for the targets agreed for the ensuing period to be shared more widely. However, it may be useful to report to Remuneration Committee that an appraisal interview has taken place.

9. Newly Appointed Chief Executives

In the case of a newly appointed Chief Executive, there may not be any targets or reports on progress available from a preceding appraisal cycle. In this situation, it is helpful to review the recruitment process particularly any specific objectives that may have been incorporated into the selection process.

It may be helpful to consider a mid-term review at three to six months following the commencement in post. This will allow the Leader to provide some initial formal feedback and provide time for the new Chief Executive to have assessed the organisation and considered their approach to the role. Any developmental needs can also be considered and planned. Initial objectives can also be established during this period to cover the initial few months after appointment until the first appraisal cycle commences.

Excerpt from the JNC (joint negotiating committee) Conditions of Service Handbook for local authority Chief Executives. This sets out the conditions of service of employees engaged on terms as laid down by the Joint Negotiating Committee for Chief Executives of Local Authorities. The excerpt below sets out the appraisal process.

Appendix 1

JOINT GUIDANCE ON APPRAISAL OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1.1 This guidance is intended for use by senior elected members and the chief executive when agreeing a process for appraising the performance of the chief executive. The focus of this process should be on clarifying what the chief executive is expected to achieve and on identifying any continuing developmental needs which, if met, would maintain a high level of performance. The process of setting objectives should be by agreement and the result should be to identify objectives which are relevant and challenging but achievable.

Appendix 2

JOINT GUIDANCE ON APPRAISAL OF THE CHIEF EXECUTIVE

1. INTRODUCTION

1.2 The process should not become complex. At all times it needs to focus clearly on a few basic issues: what the chief executive's job is; what has been done well; what could have been done better; the major issues over the next year; and what developmental needs the process clearly identifies.

2. RESPONSIBILITY FOR APPRAISAL

2.1 The responsibility for appraising the chief executive lies with senior elected members. It is a contractual obligation on the part of both the chief executive and the employing council to engage in a regular process of appraisal.

2.2 It will be for local decision in the light of local circumstances whether the appraisal should be carried out by a small committee representing all political groups or by a senior representative or representatives of the controlling group. Whichever approach is adopted, those conducting the appraisal need to bear in mind at all times that the chief executive is employed by the council as a whole, not by the controlling group, and is therefore required to serve all of the council.

3. AIMS OF APPRAISAL

- To identify and clarify the key objectives, priorities and targets of the council and appropriate timescales for their achievement over the next (e.g. twelve) months
- Agree what the chief executive should personally achieve over the next (e.g. twelve) months and identify required standards of performance, in order to deliver the council's key objectives, priorities and targets. Wherever possible standards of performance should be expressed in ways which can be monitored objectively

- Discuss positive achievements over the past (e.g. twelve) months and identify reasons for good performance

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- Discuss instances over the past (e.g. twelve) months where targets have not been met, identifying the factors preventing the achievements of agreed goals

- Discuss developmental requirements. The chief executive will have strengths and weaknesses and the parties should identify the professional development necessary to equip the chief executive with the requisite skills to meet the council's objectives. The parties should be proactive and anticipate future developmental needs in the context of the council's changing priorities. This discussion could lead to the design of a formal programme of continuous professional development (CPD). Equally this discussion may lead to agreement on changes to the working relationship between leading members and the chief executive. It should not be assumed that it is only the chief executive who may need to adjust his / her approach to the working relationship

3.1 Appraisal should be set in the context of the council's objectives, priorities and targets, generally expressed in corporate plans. Appraisal targets when taken as a whole should be related to agreed targets for the council as a whole.

4. THE APPRAISAL CYCLE

4.1 Appraisal should take place on a predetermined date, **at least annually**, backed up by regular monitoring meetings at which targets can be reviewed for continuing relevance. A formal system of appraisal should not prevent the continuous review of progress and performance.

5. KEY ELEMENTS OF THE APPRAISAL PROCESS

- Continuous two-way monitoring of performance against objectives
- Preparation for an appraisal interview
- An appraisal interview where recent and current performance, future objectives and development needs are discussed
- Agreement on action required from either party to ensure required performance is achievable
- A continuing process of informal discussion regarding performance

6. The appraisal interview and afterwards

- Both parties should be well informed and prepared for the interview
- The process should be two-way
- The interview should be free from interruptions, and notes should be taken when necessary

- The parties should concentrate as far as possible on established facts rather than unsubstantiated opinions
- Targets which are realistic and capable of being monitored should be agreed
- Any agreed personal development plans should be implemented within the agreed timescale
- The chief executive should be given a reasonable opportunity to correct any shortfalls in performance
- A date for the next review should be agreed

7. EXTERNAL ASSISTANCE

7.1 External assistance in facilitating the appraisal process can be helpful in providing an independent perspective.

7.2 Within the local government 'family', it may be sought from the Local Government Association or by contacting the Employers' Secretary or from the appropriate Regional Employers' Organisation or ALACE or SOLACE. Alternatively, such assistance may be available from commercial sources, such as consultancy firms.

7.3 Such assistance from the aforementioned organisations may take the form of them either directly participating in the process for which a fee may be requested to cover staff time or the recommendation of, for example, a suitably experienced recently retired senior officer or other independent individual.

Note: If external assistance is sought, it must have the agreement of both sides.

8. OTHER MATTERS

8.1 The detailed content of appraisal interviews should normally be treated as confidential to the participants, unless both parties agree that it would be helpful for the targets agreed for the ensuing period to be shared more widely. However, it may be useful to report to an appropriate committee meeting that an appraisal interview has taken place.

8.2 This may be useful in acting as a reminder that the chief executive and members need to ensure that chief officers are in their turn appraised.

8.3 It should, however, not be assumed that the process for appraising the chief executive should be followed in precise detail for other staff. There is a fundamental difference between elected members appraising the chief executive and managers appraising subordinates. The principles, nevertheless, are the same.

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COUNCIL 10 DECEMBER 2024

FINANCIAL PROCEDURE RULES AND FINANCIAL REGULATIONS

Report by Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. Council is **RECOMMENDED** to
 - a) Approve the amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations, as recommended by the Audit and Governance Committee.

Executive Summary

2. It has recently been identified that the amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations updated in April 2020, that remain in current operation, have not been approved by Council. The last approved version was in 2016.
3. The amendments made in 2020 were scheduled to be presented to Council for approval in April 2020, but the meeting was cancelled following the outbreak of the Covid 19 pandemic. The agenda item was never rescheduled. It is a requirement under the Constitution that Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations are subject to approval by Council.
4. This was reported to the Audit and Governance Committee at its meeting on 27 November 2024. At that meeting the Committee considered all the amendments set out in this paper, including those made in 2020 and the additional minor amendments to the Financial Regulations identified in November 2024. The amendments were endorsed by the Committee for Council consideration and approval.

Background and Summary

5. In 2016 the Financial Regulations were integrated as part of the Financial Procedure Rules, listed in full. In April 2020, the Financial Regulations were separated from the main body of the Financial Procedure Rules, with only a high-level index retained as an annex to the rules. This effectively removed the Financial Regulations from the Constitution document, with the rationale that the regulations themselves are designed to set out the operational financial policies and framework for managing the council's financial affairs. They are intended to be the reference point for staff and members rather than

as a public facing document. Procedurally though the requirement for changes to the Financial Regulations to be approved by Council was unchanged.

6. The other key change between the 2016 and 2020 versions was to the authorisation levels for Capital, section 5 of the Financial Regulations. The detail of the changes is shown in the table attached as annex 1. (See also para. 8 of this report).
7. The 2020 updated version was due to be approved by Council in April 2020 and should have been preceded by a review of the proposed amendments by the Audit and Governance Committee in March 2020. Both meetings were cancelled following the lockdown resulting from the onset of the Covid 19 pandemic.
8. The 2020 updates of both the Financial Procedure Rules and the Financial Regulations were applied to the published Constitution and the internal governance pages on the Council's intranet at that time and are currently in operation; however procedurally because of the Council meeting being cancelled in April 2020, and with the agenda item never being rescheduled, these updates have never been formally approved.
9. On 1 November 2022, Council approved further amendments to section 5 (Capital) of the Financial Regulations ([Capital Governance – Amendments to the Financial Regulations](#)). (These changes were agreed by the Audit and Governance Committee on 21 September 2022). The amendments were made to reflect the review of the Capital Governance Framework. The updates were mostly immaterial but did include amending the approval limits to sections 5.5 Disposal of Land and Property, and 5.6 Transfer of Property Assets to be consistent with those in sections 5.1 Capital Resource Allocation, and 5.2 Variations in time, cost, and scope. The approval limits set out in 5.1 and 5.2 were those updated in April 2020, that were never presented to Council for approval. Council did approve the amendments to section 5 of the Financial Regulations on 1 November 2022, but the authorisation limits shown in relation to 5.1 and 5.2 were not presented as amendments. Therefore, whilst the approval of the amendments is an endorsement of the limits shown throughout section 5, there has never been a formal approval of the limits shown in section 5.1 and 5.2. (see Annex 1)
10. There are some further immaterial presentational changes required to both documents, to reflect title changes and also to remove the section on virement rules within the Financial Regulations as this is already covered under Part 3, Section 3.3 of the Constitution. The changes are listed in Annex 2.

Financial Implications

11. There are no financial implications.

Comments checked by: Lorna Baxter, Executive Director Resources and S151 Officer lorna.baxter@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

12. There are no legal implications in the report.

Comments checked by: Paul Grant, Head of Legal and Deputy Monitoring Officer paul.grant@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

13. There are no staff implications.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

14. There are no equality and inclusion implications.

Sustainability Implications

15. There are no sustainability implications.

Risk Management

16. There are no risk management implications associated with this report.

Lorna Baxter
Executive Director Resources and S151 Officer

Annex: ANNEX 1 – Table showing changes to approvals in Financial Regulations section 5 – Capital

ANNEX 2 - Summary of the November 2024 amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations.

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Ian Dyson, Director Financial and Commercial Services.
ian.dyson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

November 2024

ANNEX 1 – Table showing changes to approvals in Financial Regulations section 5 – Capital

	2016			2022			Current Finance Regs	
	Amount	Approver		Amount	Approver		Amount	Approver
Initial resource allocation	£25k or less	Corporate Finance Manager		£50k or less	Head of Service, FBP & Senior Corp Acc (Capital)		£50k or less	Head of Service & Senior P&RA
	£25k to £500k	Director of E&E and CFO		£50k to £500k	Service Director		£50k to £500k	Service Director & S151 Officer
	Above £500k	Cabinet		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer
				£1m or above	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet
Contractual Commitments	£500k or less	Service or Cost centre manager		£500k or less	Authorised officer as per scheme of delegation		£500k or less	Authorised officer as per scheme of delegation
	£500k to £1m	Service manager		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer
	£1m to £2m	Deputy Director		£1m or above	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet
	£2m to £5m	Director and CFO						
	Above £5m	Cabinet						
Cost Variation	£25k or less	Corporate Finance Manager		£50k or less	Head of Service, FBP & Senior Corp Acc (Capital)		£50k or less	Head of Service, FBP & Senior P&RA
	£25k to £500k	Director of E&E and CFO		£50k to £500k	Service Director & FPB		£50k to £500k	Service Director & FPB
	Above £500k	Cabinet		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer		£500k to £1m	S151 Officer
				£1m or above	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet

	2016			2022			Current Finance Regs	
	Amount	Approver		Amount	Approver		Amount	Approver
Disposal of Land	Less than £2m	Deputy Director E&E		Less than £500k	Director of Property		Less than £500k	Director of Property
	£2m to £5m	Director of E&E and CFO		£500k to £1m	SCB		£500k to £1m	SCB
	£5m or more	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet
Disposal undervalue	Less than £25k	Deputy Director E&E		Less than £50k	Director for Property		Less than £50k	Director for Property
	£25k to £500k	Deputy Director of E&E and CFO		£50k to £500k	Property Capital Programme Board		£50k to £500k	Property Capital Programme Board
	Above £500k	Director of E&E and CFO		£500k to £1m	SCB		£500k to £1m	SCB
				£1m or above	Cabinet		£1m or above	Cabinet
Transfer of Property	Less than £25k	Deputy Director E&E		<p>The process followed for the transfer of property and land assets should be robust and transparent and in accordance Section 123 of the Local Government Act 1972 and any related Council's policies (Community Asset Transfer Policy). The Director for Property should seek appropriate financial and legal advice before any transfer. Then, depending on the estimated loss of income due to the transfer of the property assets, different levels of approval are needed. These are through the approval levels under section 5.5.2</p>				
	£25k to £500k	Deputy Director of E&E and CFO						
	Above £500k	Director of E&E and CFO						

Annex 2 Summary of the November 2024 amendments to the Financial Procedure Rules and Financial Regulations.

Changes to Financial Procedure Rules

- Date
- Correcting alignment and formatting
- All references to S151 Officer, Executive Director of Resources etc. changed to: Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer

Changes to Financial Regulations

- Date
- Correcting alignment and formatting, standardising grammar and use of capital letters
- Updated hyperlinks in the text
- All references to S151 Officer, Executive Director of Resources etc. changed to: Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer
- Section 2: 2.6.2 Updated deputy S151 role to include Head of Finance Business Partnering
- Section 4: Virement section 4.3.3. This section has been removed as it already included in the Constitution, Part 3 section 3.3 Virement Rules..
- Section 5: 5.2.2 – deleted ‘think of definition’: If the cost variation is requesting additional corporate funds (~~think of definition~~) and if below £500,000 then the Deputy Section 151 Officer must approve the funding.
- Section 6: 6.3 Updated reference to Head of IT
- Section 9: 9.4.1 Updated reference to Director of HR and Cultural Change