



## **PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

**MINUTES** of the meeting held on Friday, 18 July 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.38 pm.

**Present:**

**Voting Members:**

Councillor Glynis Phillips - in the Chair  
Councillor Ian Middleton (Deputy Chair)  
Councillor Will Boucher-Giles  
Councillor Tom Greenaway  
Councillor Dr Nathan Ley  
Councillor Susanna Pressel  
Councillor Paul-Austin Sargent  
Councillor Roz Smith

**Other Members in  
Attendance:**

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and  
Cabinet Member for Resources  
Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport  
Management  
Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and  
Transformation

**Officers:**

Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways  
Meg Hopkins, Senior Transport Planner  
Joanne Fellows, Place Panning Manager (Central)  
Cherie Cuthbertson, Director of HR and Cultural Change  
Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance  
Pippa Corner, Deputy Director of Joint Commissioning  
HESC  
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager

*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.*

### **21/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS** (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Baines, substituted by Cllr Pressel, Cllr Mallon, substituted by Cllr Sargent, and Cllr Shiri.

Apologies were received from invited attendees Cllr Tim Bearder, Cabinet Member for Adults, Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Karen Fuller, Director of Adult Social Services, and Victoria Baran, Deputy Director of Adult Social Care.

## **22/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

(Agenda No. 2)

Cllr Pressel declared an interest in the Hire Bike and Scooter Update item as a member of Oxford Pedestrians Association.

Cllr Greenaway declared an interest, stating that he worked for an educational provider in Oxfordshire.

## **23/25 MINUTES**

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes for the meetings held on 04 April 2025 and 20 May 2025 were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record.

## **24/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS**

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

## **25/25 HIRE BIKE AND SCOOTER UPDATE**

(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Meg Hopkins, Senior Transport Planner, and Joanne Fellows, Place Panning Manager (Central), were invited to present an update report on Hire Bike and Scooter.

The Cabinet Member for Transport Management introduced the hire bike and scooter update, noting the trial's extension since 2021 by the Department for Transport. He acknowledged Voi as the first operator in Oxford, followed by Lime, and highlighted the initiative's success in enhancing the transport network and noted challenges related to the increase in vehicles and the need for responsible riding.

The Director of Environment and Highways updated the Committee on the outcomes of the trial. Road safety concerns were to be discussed with Thames Valley Police at a future meeting of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

The Committee explored the following questions and concerns:

- Members questioned what would happen when, and if, the Department for Transport (DfT) ended the trial as scheduled on 31 May 2026. The Senior Transport Planner explained that if the DfT did not extend the trial, the hire e-scooters would become illegal and would have to be removed from the streets. Regarding the notice period for an extension, the Senior Transport Planner stated that it had varied previously, with local authorities and national bodies requesting as much advance notice as possible for procurement reasons, but no specific timeframe could be given due to these uncertainties.

- Members raised concerns about parking issues and trouble hotspots for e-scooters and e-bikes, noting frequent complaints about poor parking and the need for operators to monitor and address these areas more proactively. It was mentioned that while operators responded when contacted, members felt they should be checking hotspots regularly without prompting. Members suggested the use of on-road parking spaces, such as converting car spaces for e-scooter and e-bike parking.

Officers confirmed that, for e-scooters, parking in marked zones was mandatory, enforced by technology that prevented ending a ride outside these zones, though this system was not always reliable. For e-bikes, the same parking model was encouraged but not legally enforceable. The committee discussed the potential benefits of on-road parking, even at the cost of removing car parking spaces to do so.

Members also asked about the availability of a map showing all parking bays, and officers noted that such a map existed but could be improved. The possibility of expanding the operating area and increasing the number of parking sites, including working with third parties like universities and extending to park and ride sites, was also considered as a way to alleviate pressure on current hotspots and provide more options for e-bike and e-scooter users.

- Members queried the health benefits of e-scooters, doubting their contribution to active travel since they required less physical effort than walking or cycling. Officers noted that while e-scooters are less active, they offer a low-emission, space-efficient alternative to cars, aiding sustainable travel goals.
- Members asked whether the introduction of e-scooters and e-bikes had affected the wider transport network, particularly regarding their impact on bus usage and whether they encouraged people to switch from walking or public transport. Officers replied that no specific local studies or surveys had been commissioned by the council to assess these impacts, though operators conducted their own surveys and the DfT was carrying out a national evaluation of the trials. It was noted that the Council was feeding into the national evaluation but was not conducting its own detailed analysis of modal shift or the effects on other transport modes.

*Cllr Pressel left the meeting at this stage.*

- Members queried the council's capabilities to enforce the terms and conditions, for e-bikes and e-scooters in Oxford, on the suppliers as it was a DfT trial, specifically regarding sanctions. Officers clarified that the e-scooter operator had a formal contract which allowed the council to enforce terms and issue sanctions, including termination for any breaches. E-bikes, however, operated under a code of conduct rather than a legally binding contract, which made enforcement measures much weaker. This regulatory gap was a national issue, and local authorities were working collectively to find solutions. The differing regulatory powers between the two modes were highlighted as a significant challenge that needed addressing.

- Members asked whether there were plans to expand e-scooter and e-bike provision to park and ride sites. Officers responded that while some park and ride sites were already within the current operating area, others were not, and expansion would require agreements with third-party landowners, as the County Council was not always the landowner.

Further, it was explained that, although the County Council might have legal permission to operate across a wider area, best practice and the initial traffic regulation order required engagement and agreement with district councils and the public before expanding the scheme. Officers confirmed that such engagement had not yet taken place with all relevant district councils, and that this was a necessary step before any further expansion.

- Members asked about increasing e-scooters and e-bikes to meet demand and using congestion charge funds for expansion. Officers explained each operator was limited due to parking constraints, so more capacity depended on additional parking space. Demand is high, as missed trip attempts outnumber completed ones. Expanding the fleet or area, integrating park and ride sites, and using congestion funds could be explored, but would need further planning and agreements. More parking sites would help address demand.

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

- That the council write to the Department for Transport (DfT) to request an earlier decision regarding the continuation of the e-scooter trial beyond May 2026.
- That the council conduct its own analysis of the e-scooter and e-bike schemes to understand their impact on other parts of the transport network.
- That the council explore the possibility of integrating e-scooters and e-bikes with park and ride sites and other transport interchanges, and that the council consider increasing the capacity of e-scooters and e-bikes to meet the latent demand.
- That the council look into the feasibility of on-street parking for e-scooters and e-bikes to alleviate issues with footway parking.
- That the council seek information from the DfT about the national evaluation timeline for the e-scooter trial, and that the council share the evaluation results of the e-scooter trial with the committee once available.

## **26/25 OUR PEOPLE AND CULTURE STRATEGY UPDATE** (Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, and Cherie Cuthbertson, Director of HR and Cultural Change were invited to present an update report on the progress of Our People and Culture Strategy.

The Deputy Leader introduced the Our People and Culture Strategy, which aimed for fair staff treatment and more opportunities. He noted progress in reducing voluntary departures, reducing sickness absence, and strengthening apprenticeships. Restructuring top management has also created a leaner organisation and saved costs.

The Director of HR and Cultural Change outlined the Our People and Culture Strategy's four pillars: attract, thrive, grow, and lead. She reported on progress such as forming a new recruitment team, implementing updated policies and manager training, investing in apprenticeships, launching a reciprocal mentoring scheme, restructuring top management, and hiring a leadership consultant.

The Committee discussed the following question and concerns:

- Members asked about the progress made in moving away from the traditional command structure towards matrix management within the Council. The Director of HR and Cultural Change responded that progress had been made, with matrix management beginning to take hold, particularly in areas like the Transformation Directorate, where programme management offices worked across different parts of the organisation. The Director of HR and Cultural Change noted that, although there were good examples of matrix management in practice, the transition was ongoing and would take time, as it represented a significant cultural shift for the Council.
- Members asked whether the Council had considered donating unused apprenticeship levy funds to other companies, as this is an available option, and also requested information on trends in job applications. The Director of HR and Cultural Change responded that the Council's main use of the levy has been internal, focusing on addressing skills gaps by aligning apprenticeships with anticipated organisational needs. She reported that the Council has used approximately 85% of the levy and is considering whether some remaining funds could be allocated to voluntary organisations in Oxfordshire for workforce development in the coming year.

The Deputy Leader added that, through Enterprise Oxfordshire, the Council participates in a project that gathers surplus apprenticeship levy funds from local businesses to create additional apprenticeship opportunities throughout the county, thereby supporting workforce development beyond the Council.

- Members observed that the report showed a reduction in staff absences, with the average dropping from 9.1 to 8.7 days per full-time equivalent, and asked if the report could include information on the financial savings achieved as a result, as well as analysis of whether absences were concentrated at particular levels of the organisation.
- Members also observed an increase in internal movement and promotions within the Council, from 4.8% to 7%. They inquired about the presence of quantifiable targets for internal progression, as well as the existence of an internal progression framework or specific support for professional development and secondments.

The Director of HR and Cultural Change responded that there was no formal target for internal promotions.

However, the Council ensured all roles were advertised internally and was considering introducing development secondments to assist staff in gaining experience for future roles. She also indicated that, during organisational redesigns, staff were encouraged to explore a broader range of positions, and flexible career development was being promoted to facilitate internal movement.

- Members questioned whether moving talent acquisition in-house meant all recruitment would be internal, and sought clarification on agency spend, retention data, and reliance on agency staff. The Deputy Leader responded that overall agency spend had decreased but remained necessary for temporary or specialist needs, with further reductions becoming harder as the baseline is reached. Improved controls and recruitment processes have reduced agency use.

The Director of HR and Cultural Change explained recruitment is now in-house for better control, though some HR and finance tasks remained with shared services. She confirmed agency spend had stabilised after previous increases, and work continued to reduce it by improving recruitment and converting agency staff to permanent roles where possible. Retention and agency staffing data are monitored quarterly and would be shared with the committee.

- Members inquired about the future direction of the employee engagement survey. The Director of HR and Cultural Change clarified that the Council had considered transitioning from an annual, extensive questionnaire to a quarterly pulse survey with fewer questions to better track trends and respond more promptly to staff feedback. She highlighted that the previous survey's length had contributed to a lower response rate and emphasised that the proposed approach would have supported more timely and effective organisational action.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- The Director of HR and Cultural Change would make sure the data report, which includes detailed information on agency spend, is circulated after the meeting

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

- That the council provides a breakdown of the detail of the levels of sickness within different parts of the organisation and at different strata of the organisation.
- That the council develops a target for internal promotions.
- That the council publishes more detail over the apprenticeship levy, particularly in supporting third sector organisations.
- That the council formalises within the strategy the good working relationships with the trade union.

- That the council refers the issue of the Employee Engagement survey to the Employment Joint Consultative Committee for further discussion.

*The Committee adjourned at 11:29 and reconvened at 11:40.*

## **27/25 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT - WITH A FOCUS OF ADULT SOCIAL SERVICES**

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, Pippa Corner, Deputy Director of Joint Commissioning HESC, and Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, were invited to present a Business Management Monitoring Report (BMMR) with a focus of Adult Social Services.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation reported an underspend in adult social care due to strong financial management. Oxfordshire County Council outperformed most peers in helping vulnerable adults remain at home. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation also emphasised the need for government reform in adult social care despite the Council's strong performance and highlighted possible challenges linked to NHS administrative changes.

*Cllr Pressel rejoined the meeting at this stage.*

The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC and the Head of Corporate Finance presented the adult social care Business Management and Monitoring report, highlighting strong collaboration between Oxfordshire County Council and the NHS amid upcoming Integrated Care Board (ICB) changes aimed at supporting frontline services. The financial overview showed an overall underspend and effective use of the Better Care Fund. They noted reduced care home use and increased home care, both linked to the Oxfordshire Way initiative.

The Committee discussed the report raising the following concerns and questions:

- Clarification on the Council's NHS relationship, noting that over 40% of Council spending goes to adult social care and citing possible effects from NHS administrative changes. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation explained that some service income is shared with the NHS, particularly for those transitioning between health and social care, and warned that changes to ICBs could disrupt current arrangements. The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC said Oxfordshire had had strong NHS partnerships and that structural changes aimed to direct more resources to frontline services, but maintaining close collaboration is vital. She emphasised that local funding should not be affected, though ongoing cooperation remains important given the complexity involved.

- Members inquired about care home vacancies, referencing a 14% reduction in activity, and asked how this impacted the financial sustainability of care homes and their ability to fill spaces previously purchased by the Council. The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC stated that the care market in Oxfordshire remained stable, with established relationships and a transparent care homes framework. She clarified that the Council aimed to support individuals to live independently for as long as possible, which resulted in fewer care home bed usages and shorter stays.

The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC observed that approximately 54% of the care market is made up of self-funders, with Council use comprising only a portion. She indicated that the Council prioritises paying fair and transparent rates to providers and supporting overall market sustainability.

- Members expressed concerns about inadequate housing, particularly regarding adaptation to heat events, which could cause earlier entry into care homes. They also questioned the impact of the construction of new private care homes and the related risks if capacity was misaligned. The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC replied that it was uncommon for people to leave care settings for their own homes; the focus had been on supporting independent living or moving individuals to more suitable housing. She highlighted that factors like housing quality and climate were outside adult social care's control, emphasising that collaboration with housing experts and the use of disabled facilities grants had been important.

On private care home capacity, The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC stated that Oxfordshire had sufficient provision and generally did not support new applications, as the aim was prolonged independent living. Furthermore, overprovision could dilute workforce and resident distribution without clear benefits to the Council or residents.

- Members asked about the 22 new beds for individuals with learning disabilities, seeking clarification on their designation, cost savings, and County Council management. The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC explained that the initiative was part of the Resonance Supported Homes Fund, aimed at providing permanent housing in Oxfordshire to prevent out-of-county placements. She clarified that the Council commissioned partner providers to deliver care, supporting independent living rather than direct provision.

The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC noted this approach improved quality of life and, while sometimes more expensive, was more cost-effective than institutional care. She confirmed the Council planned to expand this model as part of its long-term accommodation strategy.

*The Deputy Director of Commissioning HESC left the meeting at this stage.*

- The Committee inquired whether any budget underspends in adult social care were connected to government grants, and if such was the case, whether unspent grant funds would be forfeited. The Head of Corporate Finance clarified that adult social care is financed through a combination of sources, including specific



government grants. She further explained that any underspend on ring-fenced grants would be allocated to reserves for future use rather than being forfeited and noted that only a small number of grants have conditions requiring repayment if funds are not spent within the financial year.

- Members questioned the report's claim that transport emissions are difficult to decarbonise, noting that switching to electric vehicles should help, especially since the Council has few large vehicles. They also asked whether the household waste recycling metric measures collection or actual recycling, warning it could be misleading if reduced consumption isn't considered. The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation clarified the emissions figure is county-wide, not just for Council vehicles, and noted replacing specialist fleet vehicles is challenging. He agreed the recycling metric should be regularly reviewed to accurately measure performance, including both consumption and recycling.
- Members asked about delays in introducing lane rental charges for environment and highways, questioning the cause and the Council's actions. The Director explained the scheme had not been implemented because DfT had not responded to the Council's application, despite all required information being provided and an earlier decision expected. Consequently, expected scheme savings will not be realised this or next financial year.

The Committee **AGREED** to the following actions:

- More information on the high functioning autism budget, deputyship management, and the reasons for vacant posts in adult social care. The Head of Corporate Finance agreed to provide detailed responses to these queries.
- For more information regarding the total number of people accepted into domestic abuse safe accommodation. Specifically, there was concern about the unmet need for safe accommodation, with reasons including longer stays and single people without children occupying family rooms. The request was to understand what plans are in place to build more safe accommodation to meet this need.
- There was confusion over the figures in the property strategy section of the report. Members noted a discrepancy between the capital expenditure figures: £21.9 million mentioned in the narrative and £21.7 million listed in a table. The Head of Corporate Finance agreed to investigate the discrepancy and provide a detailed explanation to the Scrutiny Manager.

## **28/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER**

(Agenda No. 8)

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

## **29/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN**

(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed work programme, subject to discussions between the Chair and the Executive Director of Resources as to whether Committee dates should be changed to better accommodate the budget-setting process.

The committee discussed adding the issue of parking permits as a potential future agenda item. Members suggested investigating why a particular firm had been chosen for the parking permit process and why improvements had been difficult to secure. It was noted that the matter might relate to procurement or contract management, making it appropriate for the committee to consider.

## **30/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS**

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to scrutiny recommendations on the Business Management and Monitoring Report, and Local Enterprise Partnership Integration.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing .....