



PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 12 September 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.43 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Glynis Phillips - in the Chair
Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor Will Boucher-Giles
Councillor James Fry
Councillor Tom Greenaway
Councillor Robin Jones
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Roz Smith

**Other Members in
Attendance:**

Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation
Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People

Officers:

Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services
Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance
Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways
Phil Whitfield, Head of Network Management
Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships
Carole Stow, Engagement and Consultation Manager
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.

31/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Middleton (substitute: Cllr Jones), Cllr Ley (substitute: Cllr Batstone), and Cllr Baines (substitute: Cllr Fry).

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

Apologies were also received from Cllr Leffman, the Leader of the Council, Cllr Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Resources, Cllr Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, and Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer.

32/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

33/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 18 July 2025 as a true and accurate record.

34/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

The Committee **AGREED** to change the order of the agenda to accommodate speaker timings: Business Management and Monitoring Report, Visitor Parking Permits, and Oxfordshire Strategic Plan.

35/25 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT - WITH A FOCUS ON CHILDREN'S SERVICES, EDUCATION AND FAMILIES

(Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet Member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, and Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, were invited to present the Business Management Monitoring Report – with a focus on Children's Services, Education and Families.

The Head of Corporate Finance presented the Business Management and Monitoring Report (BMMR), noting a near break-even position for children's services but a significant overspend on the high needs Dedicated Schools Grant, threatening the Council's financial resilience. The Director of Children's Services reported that, despite rising demand, and statutory requirements, the service had reduced overspends, invested in early help and youth support, and was preparing to expand further to address legislative changes and increased needs, especially in special educational needs and disabilities.

The Committee raised the following concerns and questions about the BMMR:

- Concerning the significant increase in Education Health and Care Plans (EHCPs), whether there was a correlation between low family income and the likelihood of children needing extra educational support, how Oxfordshire compared nationally regarding EHCP rates, and if the local rate of increase matched national trends. The Director of Children's Services and the Cabinet Member for Children's Services explained that Oxfordshire had seen a 32% rise in EHCPs, with a high acceptance rate for assessments. They noted some correlation between poverty and increased contact with statutory services, but did not confirm a direct causal link.

The Cabinet Member, and Director, for Children's Services also stated that Oxfordshire's EHCP numbers had continued to rise while some other areas had plateaued, and that further research was ongoing in partnership with the Department for Education to better understand the drivers behind these trends.

- Whether any Oxfordshire schools contained reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete (RAAC) as part of their buildings and enquired about the ongoing costs of providing education for children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND), specifically what was being done to bring more students back into county provision. In response, The Director of Children's Services confirmed that, to the best of her knowledge, no Oxfordshire schools had RAAC, citing comprehensive surveys. She also outlined several projects aimed at increasing local SEND provision, including new special school places, enhanced support for mainstream schools, and pilots to help children remain in their communities rather than being educated out of county.
- About the Council's plans for allocating new government funding for Best Start provision and whether additional funding would be made available for in-house youth services. The Director of Children's Services responded that targeted youth provision funding remained ring-fenced, and Oxfordshire had been selected as one of twelve pilot authorities for a youth transformation project, which aimed to develop sustainable youth activities, particularly in rural and isolated communities.

The Director of Children's Services clarified that the pilot funding could range from £250,000 to £750,000 and would focus on organising and coordinating youth provision rather than capital projects. She also stated that Best Start funding would support services for children and adolescents, with provision extending up to age 25 where needed. The Cabinet Member for Children's Services added that the pilot aligned with the Council's strategic plan to expand youth provision.

Cllr Gaul left the meeting at this stage.

- Concerns about the existence of "youth deserts" in urban areas of the county, specifically where there were no central youth clubs despite the presence of community buildings managed by charities, and whether Council officers could support charities lacking youth work expertise. The Director of Children's Services confirmed that the Council aimed to address such gaps through its Youth Strategy, and that part of the pilot project included rebuilding youth work expertise and infrastructure. She stated that supporting training and workforce development for youth work was a priority, so officers would be able to help charities and community groups establish youth activities in available buildings.

A comment was made suggesting that the Council should work in partnership with existing youth organisations such as scouts, guides, and cadet forces, rather than trying to provide all youth services directly. It was proposed that the Council could support these groups through grant funding and by giving them access to Council properties on a rental or leasehold basis, instead of duplicating provision.

- Regarding the number of children and young people in substance misuse treatment and the failure to meet targets, with concerns expressed that the explanation cited that a new provider starting in April 2023. The Director of Children's Services noted that the contract was managed by public health and that engagement was often low because services were delivered in a clinical setting, which could deter young people, and that most need was for prevention rather than clinical intervention. She added that efforts were underway to make support more informal and accessible, and she would provide additional information to the committee about progress and outreach.

The Director of Children's Services also explained that Turning Point, which provided adult services, used a non-medical model that was successful, and explained that under the family safeguarding model, Turning Point practitioners were embedded alongside social workers. She indicated that this model worked well for adults and was being used to support children's services.

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

- Specifically to include within the brief of the forthcoming BMMR item with a focus on Public Health that issues around the underperformance and data issues related to substance misuse treatment for children and young people, specifically the lack of early intervention data and the appropriateness of the current provider be included.

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

- It was suggested that Cabinet should consider the need for more equitable distribution of voluntary sector youth services, ensuring funding is allocated based on need rather than just supporting existing services.

36/25 PARKING PERMITS (Agenda No. 7)

Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, and Phil Whitfield, Head of Network Management, were invited to present an oral update on Parking Permits.

The Director of Environment and Highways provided an overview of Oxfordshire's digital parking permits, stating that visitor permits have been in use since December 2024 under a contract with Unity5, which may be extended beyond May 2026. He noted technical issues such as system errors and slow performance, highlighting that these involved several components, for which the Council owned some responsibility, and not just Unity5. The Council was working with Unity5 to resolve these issues. The Head of Network Management added that the Council was prioritising solutions and ongoing improvements.

The Committee raised the following questions and concerns about the Parking Permit update:

- How could the parking permit system could be made simpler, given concerns about the complexity. The Director of Environment and Highways responded that the complexity related to how permits were issued, particularly the number of permits per batch and the complexity of the underlying scheme. He stated that this was a recent realisation and suggested that reviewing the scheme itself, not just the IT system, might help simplify the process.

The Head of Network Management commented that the system's complexity was partly due to its adaptability to residents' needs, which presented administrative challenges.

- The Committee discussed whether the parking permit system's challenges impacted other market towns in addition to Oxford and the options available for individuals unable to use the online system. The Director of Environment and Highways explained that the same system operated countywide, suggesting that similar issues may occur elsewhere; however, Oxford had more schemes and therefore received additional attention. He clarified that non-digital alternatives are available, including phone support and assistance at libraries.
- Whether the number of Controlled Parking Zones (CPZs) led to efficiency or complexity, and about issues with residents being unable to check if a parked car's permit was valid for a specific CPZ. It was noted that the number of CPZs might have created complexity and inefficiency and officers recognised the difficulties residents faced when trying to verify permits online, especially since the system did not specify if a permit was valid for a specific CPZ. The Director of Environment and Highways acknowledged these concerns, explaining that the variety of permits was intended to address unique local situations, but this flexibility had resulted in a more complex system. He suggested that while simplification was possible, it would need to be balanced against the need for local flexibility.
- Members were concerned by the difficulties carers faced in obtaining permits, the issue of workers' vans using two-hour parking spots by moving within the same zone, and the notice period required for not extending the parking permit system contract. It was highlighted that carers often struggled with the process, especially when different carers visited, and noted that workers on building projects tended to rotate their vans within the same parking zone, which did not deter long-term parking.

The Director of Environment and Highways acknowledged the challenges for carers and workers, stating that the process could be difficult for those with changing needs. He mentioned that lessons from the current system would inform future schemes, such as congestion charging, and that these concerns would be taken account of going forward.

The Head of Network management explained that contractor permits were available and could be purchased for a week, but currently, there was no option for shorter durations. It was acknowledged that this weekly permit system was not flexible for those needing only a few hours, and the cost would likely be passed on to the customer.

- There were concerns about the cost of the parking permit contract and the overall strategy. The Director of Environment and Highways explained that Oxfordshire County Council was contracted with Unity 5 for parking management software, with the contract running until May 2026 and the option to extend for up to two years. It was noted that Unity 5 was a mature provider in the market. The strategy involved reviewing whether to address current system issues with Unity 5 or to consider retendering for a new provider, balancing the need for system improvements with the flexibility required by local schemes.
- How many people had been fined for not having a visitor's permit due to the complexity of the online system, and how many appeals had been made, as a measure of the system meeting the needs of residents. The Head of Network management stated that the Council reviewed appeals on their merits to determine if genuine difficulties with the system were involved, but specific numbers were not available at the meeting.

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

- The Head of Network Management would attempt to collate the parking permits appeals data as part of a forthcoming report.
- To request of the Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee that it review the protection of two-hour parking spaces, which are important for carers and short visits.
- A full paper with detailed information would be brought back to the committee, likely at the December meeting.

The Committee highlighted the following as potential recommendations following the future paper:

- Improving non-digital access to visitor permits for those not digitally enabled.
- Simplifying the permit system and proposed that the Place Scrutiny Committee examine this in more detail.

The Committee took at break at 11:24 and returned at 11:34.

37/25 OXFORDSHIRE STRATEGIC PLAN (Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance and Deputy Section 151 Officer, Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships, and Carole Stow, Engagement and Consultation Manager, were invited to present a report on The Oxfordshire Strategic Plan.

The Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation introduced the draft strategic plan as a replacement for the previous, more complex version, explaining

that the new plan aimed to simplify objectives, better align council actions with strategic goals, and improve communication with the public. The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships added that the plan focused on three core themes: Greener, Fairer, and Healthier, with clear headline projects shaped by public feedback. It would be accompanied by an outcomes framework that included the new national measures being developed as part of the Local Government Outcomes Framework.

Councillors discussed a number of concerns they had with the strategy, such as public transport, climate planning, gully maintenance, and community banking. The Committee also discussed and questioned the following areas of the strategic plan:

- Seeking clarification on what a network of mobility hubs entailed and how the mobility hubs would function. The Cabinet Member and Officers explained that mobility hubs were intended as locations where people could switch between different modes of transport, such as hiring a bike, changing buses, taking a train, or using a scooter. The discussion also highlighted the practical need for facilities like shelter and toilets at these hubs, and it was suggested that the Place Scrutiny Committee could examine the current status, planning assumptions, and financial implications of mobility hubs.
- Whether the data on climate change impacts, such as excess deaths, could be updated and broadened to include other indicators like hospitalisations and the effects of heat on school performance. It was suggested that addressing these issues could lead to long-term savings for public services. Additionally, it was pointed out that the Council's approach to flooding focused mainly on drain cleaning and flood wardens, but in some areas, the main issue was rapid water run-off into waterways. It was recommended that the Council's role in managing run-off should be included as part of its flood prevention strategy.

The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships also explained that the Council's focus was now on both improving response to flooding and building resilience, as such extreme weather events were becoming more frequent. The importance of working closely with partners and preparing for these recurring challenges was emphasised.

- The committee considered the report of engagement activity which was designed to support the development of the Strategic Plan. Members questioned whether the council had engaged with a sufficiently wide range of residents as part of its engagement on the plan and whether face-to-face engagement could be used alongside online methods. Concerns were also expressed about the representativeness of the data, particularly regarding rural areas, pockets of deprivation outside Oxford, and the inclusion of hard-to-reach groups, and the readability of the resident research report.

The Engagement and Consultation Manager explained that the research had included nine focus groups covering rural, urban, and more deprived areas (as set out in the report: drawn from the 10 wards in Oxfordshire which include small areas ranked within the 20% most deprived in England), with participants from different demographics and life stages.

- In relation to the Council's net zero target for 2030, specifically noting that the council's emissions had been reduced by a third since 2008 and querying whether it was realistic to cut the remaining two-thirds in just five years. The Committee sought assurance and quantitative data on how this target would be achieved. The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships provided reassurance that significant work was underway, including a programme of decarbonising council buildings and fleet. It was noted that the fleet, responsible for over a third of emissions, was being switched to electric vehicles.
- How the Council matched its decisions to its strategic plan and how this information was presented to residents, noting that it was often difficult to find clear links between actions, spending, and progress towards targets. The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships acknowledged this issue and stated that work was underway to improve accessibility, including developing a citizens' portal or dashboard to make data and progress more transparent and easier to understand. It was also mentioned that the outcomes framework would play a key role in this, and that councillors could be involved as a focus group to test these new tools.
- Councillors raised the poor condition of footways, with concerns that new cycleways were being built while existing pedestrian paths remained in disrepair, making them unsafe or inaccessible for wheelchair users, the elderly, and parents with prams. It was highlighted that this issue affected both rural and urban areas, and that lack of funding had historically limited upgrades.
- Members raised several detailed questions relating to the content in the strategic plan. They asked for a clear explanation of the process for reporting and rectifying poor highway works, including utility repairs, and sought information on the economics of different pothole repair strategies. They questioned how the Council was addressing declining primary school numbers and the impact of congestion charges and traffic filters on school staff. Members also asked about the balance between housing targets and protecting green spaces, the absence of references to improving diets, access to sports facilities in the health section, the lack of a reference to campaigns aimed at encouraging children to take regular exercise such as the "mile a day", the lack of mention of "Best Start in Life" as a successor to Sure Start, and the need to prioritise local renewable energy infrastructure.

In response, the Cabinet Member acknowledged that Members' points were valuable, and that these issues should be considered for inclusion in the final strategy document.

The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships responded by explaining that the strategic plan was not intended to be a comprehensive record of all Council activities, but rather to highlight a selection of key priorities and provide a flavour of broader work. She emphasised that there was a significant amount of work happening behind the scenes on issues such as child obesity and the green agenda, but the plan was a snapshot rather than an exhaustive list.

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

- The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships would seek further quantitative data from the climate team to provide assurances on how the council's net zero targets would be met.
- The Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships would request more recent data on excess deaths related to climate change, such as heat and flooding.
- An all-councillor briefing on resident feedback from the focus groups alongside the annual residents' survey results.

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

- To consider improving access to community banking and post office services as part of the strategic plan.
- The Council was advised to better explain the link between its green agenda and local resident concerns, using clearer language and relatable examples.
- The deliverability of the Council's net zero ambitions was to be examined with qualitative data.
- Members to be engaged in the development of the Citizens portal for better accessibility and transparency.
- There was a recommendation to increase focus on improving footways to facilitate walking.
- Expanding access to bus services was suggested as a priority.
- It was requested that more resident feedback be included in future reports, including richer qualitative data.
- Improved accessibility in terms of terminology and the presentation of feedback from residents.
- Not only to focus on the Council's deficits, but also their successes to date.
- Clarifying how the Council wishes to balance its competing desires to protect green spaces whilst also providing housing
- Raising the profile of Best Start as a successor to Sure Start within the plan
- Improving access to renewable energy infrastructure

The Committee also **AGREED** to make observations in relation to issues arising from the draft strategic plan around:

- Addressing highways issues: specifically poor repairs following utility works and the cost-benefit analysis of different approaches to types of repair.
- Plans to manage the reductions in demand for school places
- Concerns over the impact of the congestion charge on schools within the charging zone
- The fundamental importance of improving diet and exercise, particularly for young people, if a healthier Oxfordshire is to be delivered

38/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee discussed future agenda items for their work programme. They agreed to review the performance of Fix My Street, focusing on usage, feedback, accuracy, timeliness, and the recent "cleansing" of old reports, which had caused concern among residents. They also decided to examine the use of AI in customer services, including resident awareness, effectiveness, and impact on response times. Councillor Mallon suggested that local government reorganisation should be a standing item, given its significant implications for council operations and finances. It was noted that local government reorganisation was already scheduled for discussion at the Place Scrutiny Committee, and officers would coordinate to avoid duplication. The Committee confirmed that public health and parking permits would return as agenda items for the December meeting.

The Committee **AGREED** to the proposed work programme with the addition of BMMR (Public Health), Parking Permits, Fix My Street, AI, and, potentially, LGR – subject to scoping a report which would not conflict with those going to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing