



Notice of a Meeting

Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

**Friday, 27 February 2026 at 10.00 am
Room 2&3 - County Hall, New Road, Oxford OX1 1ND**

These proceedings are open to the public

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

Membership

Chair: Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE

Deputy Chair: Councillor Andy Graham

Councillors: Dr Izzy Creed Johnny Hope-Smith James Plumb
Rebekah Fletcher Emma Markham
Georgina Heritage Toyah Overton

Co-Optees: Fraser Long Toby Long Peace Nnaji

Date of Next Meeting: *27 March 2026*

For more information about this Committee please contact:

Committee Officer: *Richard Doney*

Email: *scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk*

Martin Reeves
Chief Executive

February 2026

What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

The Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee focuses on on the following key areas a) All services and preventative activities/initiatives relating to children, young people, education (including Home to School Transport and Special Educational Needs and Disability but excluding adult education), and support of families; b) 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; c) Matters relating to care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services d) The welfare of unaccompanied young asylum seekers e) Services for Young Carers

How can I have my say?

We welcome the views of the community on any issues in relation to the responsibilities of this Committee. Members of the public may ask to speak on any item on the agenda or may suggest matters which they would like the Committee to look at. **Requests to speak must be submitted to the Committee Officer below no later than 9 am 4 working day before the date of the meeting.**

About the County Council

The Oxfordshire County Council is made up of 69 councillors who are democratically elected every four years. The Council provides a range of services to Oxfordshire's 763,200 residents.

These include:

schools	social & health care	libraries and museums
the fire service	roads	trading standards
land use	transport planning	waste management

Each year the Council manages £1.2 billion of public money in providing these services. Most decisions are taken by a Cabinet of 10 Councillors, which makes decisions about service priorities and spending. Some decisions will now be delegated to individual members of the Cabinet.

About Scrutiny

Scrutiny is about:

- Providing a challenge to the Cabinet
- Examining how well the Cabinet and the Authority are performing
- Influencing the Cabinet on decisions that affect local people
- Helping the Cabinet to develop Council policies
- Representing the community in Council decision making
- Promoting joined up working across the authority's work and with partners

Scrutiny is NOT about:

- Making day to day service decisions
- Investigating individual complaints.

What does this Committee do?

The Committee meets at least 4 times a year. It develops a work programme, which lists the issues it plans to investigate. These investigations can include whole committee investigations undertaken during the meeting, or reviews by a panel of members doing research and talking to lots of people outside of the meeting. Once an investigation is completed the Committee provides its advice to the Cabinet, the full Council or other scrutiny committees. Meetings are open to the public and all reports are available to the public unless exempt or confidential, when the items would be considered in closed session.

If you have any special requirements (such as a large print version of these papers or special access facilities) please contact the officer named on the front page, giving as much notice as possible before the meeting

A hearing loop is available at County Hall.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**

To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.

2. **Declaration of Interests**

See guidance note on the back page.

3. **Minutes (Pages 7 - 18)**

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 30 January 2026 and to receive information arising from them.

4. **Petitions and Public Addresses**

Members of the public who wish to speak on an item on the agenda at this meeting can attend the meeting in person or 'virtually' through an online connection.

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting, i.e., Tuesday, 24 February, 2026.

Requests should be submitted to the Scrutiny Officer at scrutiny@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.

Where there are a number of requests from persons wishing to present similar views on the same issue, the Chair may require that the views be put by a single spokesperson. It is expected that only in exceptional circumstances will a person (or organisation) be allowed to address more than one meeting on a particular issue in any period of six months.

The public is reminded that the Committee is not a decision-making body and that it cannot investigate individual complaints. The Committee requests that no individual children are named when addressing the Committee

5. **Early Years**

Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director of Education and Inclusion, Jaswinder Didiyally, Assistant Director – School and Settings (Sufficiency), and Kim Wilson, Assistant Director – Schools and Settings (Standards, Effectiveness, and Performance) have been invited to present a report on Early Years provision.

The Committee is asked to consider the report and raise any questions, and to **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet arising therefrom.

to follow

6. **Scrutiny Review Panel Terms of Reference (Pages 19 - 24)**

The Committee has requested that terms of reference be drawn up for a Scrutiny Review Panel regarding Woodeaton Manor School.

The Committee is **RECOMMENDED** to consider the report and to:

- i. **AGREE** membership allocations
- ii. **AGREE** with the approach and schedule of meetings set out in the report;
- iii. **APPOINT** the membership.

7. **Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations**

No responses were due.

8. **Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 25 - 26)**

The Committee is recommended to **AGREE** its work programme for forthcoming meetings, having heard any changes from previous iterations, and taking account of the Cabinet Forward Plan and of the Budget Management Monitoring Report.

9. **Committee Action and Recommendation Tracker (Pages 27 - 32)**

The Committee is recommended to **NOTE** the progress of previous recommendations and actions arising from previous meetings, having raised any questions on the contents.

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.

Where a matter arises at a meeting which affects your own financial interest or wellbeing, a financial interest or wellbeing of a relative or close associate or a financial interest or wellbeing of a body included under other registrable interests, then 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.

EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 30 January 2026 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.23 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE - in the Chair
Councillor Andy Graham (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Dr Izzy Creed
Councillor Rebekah Fletcher
Councillor Georgina Heritage
Councillor Johnny Hope-Smith
Councillor Emma Markham
Councillor Toyah Overton
Councillor James Plumb

Co-Optee Members:

Fraser Long
Peace Nnaji

Other Members:

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People

Officers:

Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services
Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education and Inclusion
Deborah Smit, Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion
Matthew Tait, the Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

Others:

Jules Francis-Sinclair, Chair of Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum
Sophia Johnson, Feedback and Reporting Co-Ordinator at Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum
Steve Crocker, Independent Chair of the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board

The Committee 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.

1/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, sent apologies that she would be late.

2/26 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

3/26 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the previous meeting held on 21 November 2025 as a true and accurate record.

4/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

(Agenda No. 4)

Dr Claire El Mouden addressed the Committee, stated that the Council had not followed instructions to co-produce EOTAS guidance with parents. She said that, since June of the previous year, there had been no meetings between officers and parents about the guidance, and only one meeting about the toolkit. Dr El Mouden's EOTAS Working Group had conducted their own consultation, finding the guidance unclear, overly complex, and inaccessible. She called for practical tools, clearer responsibilities, and questioned the implementation of scrutiny recommendations.

The Chair reminded the Committee that it could not instruct. The Committee had made recommendations.

5/26 LOCAL AREA PARTNERSHIP MONITORING AND PRIORITY ACTION PLAN

(Agenda No. 5)

The Committee invited Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, Matthew Tait, the Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer, to attend to present the report as well as Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director for Education, Deborah Smit, Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion, Steve Crocker, Independent Chair of the Oxfordshire SEND Strategic Improvement and Assurance Board, and Jules Francis-Sinclair, the Chair of the Oxfordshire Parent Carer Forum.

The Committee also welcomed Sophia Johnson, Feedback and Reporting Co-Ordinator at OxPCF, to the meeting to support the discussion.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People commented on the progress within the SEND Local Area Partnership over recent years and expressed confidence that the Partnership had matured into a more coherent, outcome focused endeavour. This renewed assurance stemmed from stronger joint working arrangements and the steady stewardship of The Independent Chair. The Cabinet Member emphasised that

collective effort across agencies and dedicated work by officers had helped establish a clearer, shared purpose around improving outcomes for children and young people with SEND.

The Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion provided a structured overview of the Local Area Partnership's progress since the SEND inspection of July 2023. Five priority action areas framed the work: elevating the voices of children and young people with SEND; strengthening communication across the system; improving the quality and timeliness of Education, Health and Care Plans (EHCPs); reinforcing commissioning; and ensuring robust accountability and governance. She reported steady, evidenced progress across each area, supported by ongoing monitoring and scrutiny by national regulators. Whilst acknowledging improvements, she highlighted challenges that still required attention, including inconsistencies in communication, deepening workforce understanding of SEND, and widening participation in the youth forum so that more voices were captured.

The Independent Chair underscored the centrality of partnership working. He observed that the system had become more cohesive and practical in its focus, with headteachers, health partners and Council officers working more consistently toward shared objectives. He nonetheless cautioned that the Partnership operated within a national context marked by structural pressures, uneven performance and ongoing turbulence. Sustaining local progress would therefore require vigilance, continuous attention to delivery, and a readiness to adapt.

Building on those points, the Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer set out the developments seen across joint working in the previous six to twelve months. He noted that partners had engaged in difficult conversations and stayed committed despite pressures. The shift in emphasis towards transformation, redesigned pathways, and earlier access to support had begun to make a difference in some areas, even where the overall system remained under strain. These changes reflected a growing confidence to test new models rather than rely solely on additional capacity.

The Feedback and Reporting Co-ordinator at the OxPCF explained that she and colleagues had contributed extensively to the coproduction of the Priority Action Plan. Many of the Forum's proposals had been retained in the final document; others had not been included because they lacked measurable indicators or alignment with regulatory requirements, and some had been redirected into the wider SEND improvement programme. This approach ensured that contributions without immediate metrics were not lost but were instead tracked through relevant workstreams.

Members raised local government reorganisation (LGR) and its potential implications. Members recognised that the scale of possible structural change called for early planning and careful stewardship through transition. The Independent Chair confirmed that the Partnership had deliberately considered these issues and was preparing for different scenarios. He noted that, should the improvement notice be lifted, his role would not technically be required; however, he had agreed to remain in post through any reorganisation to provide continuity as well as to reassure partners and to preserve momentum. This would help ensure a smooth handover into

whatever new arrangements might follow. The Partnership would continue to keep reform firmly in mind while acknowledging that the ultimate shape of future governance was not yet known.

Waiting times and what improvements in those could be evidenced was raised. The Independent Chair distinguished between waits linked to the EHCP process and those within broader health services. He confirmed that health advice for EHCPs was generally being provided within the statutory six-week timeframe, and that overall EHCP timeliness had risen above national averages. The Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer added that progress across health services was mixed: occupational therapy waits had reduced from thirty-three to twenty-two weeks, while waits for speech and language therapy and physiotherapy had remained static or increased in places. He observed that meaningful gains often came from redesigned pathways, such as improved triage and targeted support, rather than from simple increases in staffing.

The discussion also explored early support at the point when concerns first emerged, particularly in early years settings. Officers explained that while formal assessments could involve delays, urgent cases were triaged to ensure that the highest need children were seen first. They highlighted the use of the WellComm screening tool in early years, which enabled practitioners to identify speech and language needs quickly and start targeted activities without delay. These interventions were recorded and monitored, and they informed joint commissioning reviews, creating a clearer picture of demand and helping the system to respond more intelligently. Officers further noted that training for school and early years staff had been expanded, so that practical help could be provided while families waited for specialist input.

Members examined the balance between the improved timeliness of EHCPs and the imperative to maintain quality. Officers recognised the risk of prioritising speed over substance and set out the safeguards that had been put in place. The Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion reported that timeliness had improved markedly, with recent performance at 92% and the average issuing time now below twenty weeks. To protect quality and consistency, multi-agency assurance processes had been implemented, including quarterly reporting by service leads on both timeliness and the quality of professional advice. Regular audits were undertaken, and focused development targeted sections requiring improvement, such as capturing the child's view and strengthening professional contributions. The intention was to embed a high-quality standard across all plans, not merely to achieve faster throughput.

There was further consideration of how Oxfordshire's waiting times compared with neighbouring areas. Officers explained that, across the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West system, Oxfordshire's waiting times were broadly comparable, though the picture varied by service. Occupational therapy had seen tangible reductions, while speech and language and physiotherapy remained more static. Officers reiterated that training and early help approaches were being expanded so that support could begin ahead of formal assessment, thereby reducing the impact of waits on education and development.

Members then discussed how progress against the Priority Action Plan was being measured, given the value of clear indicators to flag issues early. Officers explained

that, whilst an earlier plan iteration had used a Red-Amber-Green framework linked to Department for Education stocktakes, the updated assurance model sat within the broader SEND transformation governance. Themed working groups now produced monthly highlight reports covering progress, next steps, and any risks or barriers. These reports were escalated to the Partnership Delivery Group and the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board, enabling structured challenge and early resolution. This approach aimed to identify risks promptly rather than allow pressures to accumulate unnoticed.

The incorporation of children and young people's voices formed a further strand of discussion, including whether older young people were asked to reflect on earlier stages of their journey. The Independent Chair confirmed that this retrospective perspective was already being captured. Older young people attending the Improvement Board had offered thoughtful reflections on what might have helped at critical points, such as the transition to secondary school, and how earlier support could have altered their experiences. He cautioned that, whilst these narratives were valuable, it was important not to overgeneralise from individual accounts, and to triangulate feedback with wider system evidence.

Communication structures were also reviewed, with Members probing whether improvements were embedded across the system, rather than concentrated in standalone initiatives. Officers described a set of measures introduced since 2023: online SEND Conversations that opened two-way dialogue with parents and explained transformation work; focused listening events on themes such as communication, travel and alternative provision; and the coproduction of a Communication Pledge that set out clear expectations for families. Together, these actions formed the backbone of a more transparent, regular and trust building approach to engagement.

Officers and representatives from OxPCF reflected further on the effect of these changes. The Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion reported that the combination of listening events and SEND Conversations had created more constructive dialogue and practical feedback loops. The Feedback and Reporting Co-ordinator confirmed that OxPCF had strengthened its mechanisms for gathering and channelling parent experiences across multiple workstreams, though capacity and reach remained active challenges. The Chair of OxPCF agreed that partnership working had deepened and that parent voice was more consistently embedded in discussions, whilst acknowledging that aligning feedback with fast moving workstreams would continue to require attention.

Steve Crocker left the meeting at this stage.

Later discussion scrutinised the target for improving healthcare transitions by spring 2027, with questions raised about feasibility given the pressures in adult services. The Integrated Care Board's Chief Operating Officer acknowledged the scale of the challenge. He explained that improvements depended on both service transformation and securing sufficient investment to address the mismatch between demand and capacity. While some waiting times had reduced in specific services, the broader aim would require sustained resourcing. He stated that the Board intended to reduce community waiting times to eighteen weeks over the next two years, though financial

risks remained because the required level of investment had yet to be secured. Officers agreed that the assumptions underpinning the 2027 target should be revisited to test their realism.

The proposed ambition of a 25% reduction in Care and Patient Advice and Liaison Service (PALS) complaints was also examined. Members questioned whether this represented a sufficiently stretching goal, given that a complaint at that level often indicated that earlier support had not been effective. Officers accepted the point and agreed that the target should be reviewed. They observed that many complaints reflected system wide capacity pressures rather than isolated failings but acknowledged the need for sharper focus on earlier interventions and stronger support to prevent escalation. A reconsidered target would balance realism with ambition and would be aligned to the transformation work already underway.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People recognised the significant progress achieved while emphasising that there was no complacency about the work still to be done. The Cabinet Member praised the commitment of partners and officers, reiterated the intention to maintain momentum, and suggested that members might benefit from observing the SEND Improvement and Assurance Board's work first hand to see how the maturing partnership was driving improvement.

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

- **That the Council** should set out a clear plan for the long-term sustainability and resourcing of targeted SEND support across Oxfordshire, ensuring that improvements made through the Local Area SEND Partnership can be maintained despite ongoing financial and demand pressures.
- **That the Council** should provide an updated strategic statement on the purpose, role, and operational expectations of resource bases within Oxfordshire schools, including how these bases will be funded and supported in the medium to long term as part of the wider SEND Improvement Programme.
- **That the Council** develop and publish a strengthened transition pathway for children and young people moving from primary resource bases into secondary education, ensuring continuity of provision, clarity for families, and an enhanced assurance framework aligned to the improvement actions identified since the 2023 SEND inspection which should also include benchmarking against statistical neighbours and comparable authorities.

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

- The Interim Deputy Director to provide a graph setting out how timeliness had improved;
- Members of the Committee to be invited to observe work at the Enhanced Pathways.

6/26 EDUCATION OTHER THAN AT SCHOOL UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, the Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education and Inclusion, and Deborah Smit, Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion, were invited to present the report. Jules Francis-Sinclair, Chair of OxPCF, and Sophia Johnson, Feedback and Reporting Co-Ordinator at OxPCF, were also invited to the meeting to support the Committee's discussions.

The Cabinet Member for Children and Young People introduced the Education Other Than At School (EOTAS) item by recalling his early experience of the topic on joining the County Council and Cabinet, noting the volume of representations and the ongoing public interest. At that point, the Council had required a clear policy framework. Whilst the policy itself had included some co-production, the accompanying guidance had not. Cabinet therefore approved the policy but, in line with the Committee's recommendation required that the guidance be taken through a co production process.

The Chair of OxPCF acknowledged the substantial effort invested in developing the EOTAS guidance but considered it not yet ready to be treated as final or genuinely co-produced. Concerns centred on the process and the absence of a clear co production framework, limited senior officer involvement, and unresolved issues raised by parents. The guidance set out expectations of parents with reasonable clarity, but it was judged to lack corresponding clarity about the Council's responsibilities, arrangements for monitoring and safeguarding, and accessibility. The Chair of OxPCF recommended further senior led meetings, clearer language and structure, practical appendices, and a proper publication plan, together with a commitment to review the guidance after one year.

The Interim Deputy Director: Education and Inclusion recognised the considerable work and engagement undertaken and accepted that confidence in the document's usefulness to parents had not yet been fully established. The point of the current stage was to reflect carefully on the feedback and determine the further steps required to secure a helpful, agreed document.

The Chair clarified the role of scrutiny in relation to EOTAS and reminded members that the Committee's function was to make recommendations rather than to dictate to Cabinet. Both the policy and the draft guidance had previously gone to Cabinet; the task now was to focus on what the Committee wished to say about the guidance, rather than revisiting the detailed content line by line.

A Member suggested that, whilst the guidance might be clear for officers, it might still be insufficiently accessible for parents and proposed two versions, one setting out full information and one designed explicitly for families. The importance of language and accessibility was emphasised, together with the value of further parent input so that the resulting guidance became both meaningful and usable in practice.

Officers advised that, whilst accessibility was a core aim, excluding or oversimplifying legal material could mislead families or produce guidance unable to withstand

challenge. It was set out that the combination of legal complexity and the bespoke nature of each EOTAS package meant that co production had been sensitive and time consuming. Officers explained that EOTAS arrangements were intrinsically technical as they depended on strict statutory tests, especially the need to demonstrate that a child's needs could not be met in a school. Guidance therefore had to address detailed legal points, including the Section 61 test, commissioning responsibilities, safeguarding requirements, and expectations for monitoring provision.

The report described involvement from parents through OxPCF, parents of children with EOTAS, CAMHS representation, Oxford Health, and SENDIASS. Clarification was sought on whether these participants had in fact met collectively as a group during the guidance's development.

Officers explained that SENDIASS had been commissioned to coordinate the co production process because of its established links with families. Parent representatives, SENDIASS, health partners and others had been engaged throughout, and drafts had moved iteratively between contributors. It was acknowledged that the process had not followed a "pure" model of co-production, though contributions from parents had been extensive and coordinated.

The discussion explored why collaboration had been challenging and whether the legal framework had contributed to complexity. While accessibility was a core aim, Parents on the working group concurred that the legal technicalities complicated the process, with differing interpretations requiring repeated clarification.

Officers confirmed that, whilst the policy was required, the Council had considered it good practice to produce guidance for transparency and to help parents navigate the complexity of decisions and arrangements in practice. The guidance had therefore been commissioned to support understanding rather than to fulfil a legal duty.

Officers confirmed that other local authorities did publish EOTAS guidance, and examples had been reviewed. These could not simply be replicated, since each area's EOTAS landscape differed in local practice, parental expectations and the complexity of packages and guidance from elsewhere would not have been co-produced with Oxfordshire parents. It was also noted that some Councils operated blanket restrictions on EOTAS, whereas Oxfordshire had a comparatively higher number of complex packages, further limiting the usefulness of national templates. The guidance, therefore, needed to be shaped locally.

The breadth of parent carer involvement was discussed, including representation across different backgrounds, needs and experiences. Officers confirmed that the working group had included OxPCF, parents of children with EOTAS, SENDIASS, Oxford Health and CAMHS. SENDIASS had coordinated much of the engagement owing to strong links with families. Officers also acknowledged that they could not confirm representation across all protected characteristics or the full diversity of the parent population; achieving such representation remained challenging despite multiple routes of engagement.

Concerns about accessible language recurred, with suggestions that parents would benefit from a practical, plain English companion document containing checklists, templates, and examples. A short, two-to-five-page introduction with a glossary and contents page was suggested, supported by appendices for technical material. Officers regarded this as a reasonable approach.

Much of the existing length and complexity flowed from legal requirements and the bespoke nature of packages; however, a simplified version could outline key processes, responsibilities and safeguards in a more usable format. The Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion agreed that placing more technical material in appendices and improving clarity would be beneficial, and the Chair of OxPCF supported developing a parent facing counterpart to the technical guidance.

The Director of Children's Services joined the meeting at this stage.

The Chair returned to the question of scrutiny's role and the appropriate recommendations to Cabinet. It was suggested that Cabinet be asked to consider providing a pro forma, without the need for co production, to assist OxPCF in producing accessible materials for families. The aim would be a simpler, user-friendly resource that accurately reflected the agreed policy while improving clarity and accessibility for parents engaging with EOTAS.

The Interim Deputy Director: Education and Inclusion concluded that, although the guidance had benefited from significant input by parents and the working group, the diversity of circumstances meant it would always be difficult to meet every need fully. Not all parents were dissatisfied, but the emotive nature of EOTAS and the complexity of packages in Oxfordshire were recognised. The commitment remained to make the guidance as clear as possible, acknowledging the challenge of consensus and the learning taken from the process.

The Assistant Director: SEND and Inclusion reflected that the draft attempted both to inform parents and to document internal Officer processes; the original intention had been to guide parents through understanding EOTAS rather than to set out internal procedures. Separating the two strands into appendices was considered useful, allowing for updates as frameworks evolved, including any changes arising from a future White Paper. The emphasis would be on trust, transparency, and manageable structure.

The Committee explored whether children who had never attended school owing to severe health needs would be disadvantaged when seeking EOTAS. Officers explained that decisions turned on the legal test, whether needs could not be met in a school, rather than on prior attendance. A school would normally be consulted to assess whether it could reasonably meet the child's needs, but this did not require prior physical attendance. Children with very complex medical needs were often supported by the Hospital and Home Education Service rather than through EOTAS packages. Decisions were bespoke, and a lack of attendance history did not disadvantage such children.

Costs and construction of EOTAS packages were then discussed. Officers explained that packages were highly bespoke and therefore varied considerably in cost. The

most expensive package had been around £300,000 per year, with most falling between £60,000 and £100,000 annually. These figures reflected the requirement to commission individual provision, including tutors, therapists, specialist staff and bespoke timetables assembled to meet each child's assessed needs. Across Oxfordshire, the total cost of EOTAS packages had previously been estimated at about £3.8 million for approximately seventy children. Each package was built from a detailed assessment of need, determining which elements could not be delivered in a school setting; this bespoke approach explained both the variation in cost and the complexity of managing EOTAS arrangements.

Funding for enhanced pathways was also considered, to understand how mainstream based inclusion programmes were resourced relative to EOTAS. Officers stated that each enhanced pathway was funded at the level of one teacher and one high level teaching assistant, amounting to roughly £85,000 per year. This supported a cohort of around ten children with higher levels of need who might otherwise be at risk of moving into specialist provision. To avoid double funding, the Council deducted the Element 3 top up already allocated to each child through their EHCP, with the pathway funding supplementing that amount. The model had stabilised placements and reduced the flow into specialist settings, and the Council was exploring expansion in response to positive impact.

In concluding remarks, the Committee recognised that the guidance had progressed but accepted the case for further refinement. Recommendations favoured a clearer separation between statutory/technical material and practical, parent facing information, improved accessibility and structure, and a plan for publication and ongoing review.

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

- That the EOTAS guidance be broken down, with simpler, plain English and accessible information for parents provided in separate appendices so as to make the main guidance more manageable and user-friendly, while allowing detailed officer processes and updates to be maintained in the appendices.

7/26 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **AGREED** to the forward work plan.

The Committee was advised that terms of reference for the Woodeaton working group were being developed and it was now intended that they be submitted to the Committee at its February meeting.

The Committee agreed to a future item on support for adoptive parents, particularly focusing on challenges faced when children have difficulty adjusting, to review what support is provided in Oxfordshire.

The Committee was advised the upcoming SEND White Paper will require local area partnerships to create a transformation response plan for the Department for

Education, likely by summer or autumn, which the Committee will review once available.

8/26 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER
(Agenda No. 8)

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

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

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Divisions Affected - All

EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 February 2026

Terms of Reference for a Scrutiny Review Panel: Woodeaton Manor School

Report by the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
 - i. **AGREE** membership allocations
 - ii. **AGREE** with the approach and schedule of meetings set out in the report;
 - iii. **APPOINT** the membership.

Executive Summary

2. At its meeting on 26 September 2025, the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a working group or review panel (the Panel) to examine the circumstances and communications surrounding the direction by the Secretary of State for Education that Woodeaton Manor School must become an academy. These Terms of Reference set out the purpose, membership, working arrangements, limitations, confidentiality requirements, and reporting expectations of the Panel.
3. Members are asked to note that this is a time-limited scrutiny review Panel formed under Part 6.2(5) of the Council's constitution and is, by its nature, not a statutory review. It will be focused on the potential for learning lessons and improving practice and will explore how the Council responded when the school received a mandatory academisation order. The Panel's work will not focus on employment matters, nor will it have powers to compel the release of certain restricted or personal information.
4. The Scrutiny Review Panel is established to examine the communications, processes, and actions taken by Oxfordshire County Council during the period in which Woodeaton Manor School received its mandatory academisation order. The Panel will explore the context in which the Secretary of State takes such a decision and will consider the remit any council has in such a

circumstance. The Panel will establish what is expected to happen ordinarily and whether that happened in this instance. The Panel will seek to identify any lessons that could be learned and consider whether, upon receiving the notice, the Council acted as it reasonably ought to have done. The review will focus on the Council's role, recognising that Woodeaton Manor School operated as a foundation school without a foundation from 1 April 2008, and that staff in such schools are employed by the governing board, not the Council.

5. All meetings will be held in private. Members should be sensitive to the possibility that the Panel may be provided with information that would be exempt from disclosure. All evidence and discussions should, therefore, remain confidential during the work of the Panel before it is able to assess what can be made public. Documents provided to the Panel must not be shared or circulated without explicit authorisation. Members must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct and data protection obligations.
6. The final report will be public but there may be information within it which is exempt from publication under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as it includes information relating to an individual or to the financial or business affairs of the authority.
7. The review is not a statutory inquiry and does not have unlimited powers to obtain information or compel witnesses. The review panel has no statutory rights to information other than those that belong to the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which rules are set out largely in the Access to Information Procedure Rules at Part 8 of the Constitution. Members of Council are not entitled to receive employment records, given the restrictions of both GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and of employment confidentiality requirements.
8. The Panel will focus on communications, decision-making processes, and the Council's responsibilities during the academisation process.

Membership

9. The Panel will consist of five county councillors appointed by the Committee.
10. Part 6.2(5) states that appointments to review panels "will be made by the relevant scrutiny committee, ensuring political balance as far as possible." Standard proportional allocation, in accordance with section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and using the calculations as set out in the report to Council on 20 May 2025, would comprise: 3 Liberal Democrat Group members, 1 Labour and Co-operative Party Group member, 1 Oxfordshire Alliance Group member.
11. Whereas a sub-committee must ensure, under the provisions of the same Local Government and Housing Act 1989, that the majority is drawn from the ruling administration, that is not the case for a working group or review panel

which is not defined in statute. It would, therefore, be open to the Committee to appoint members from each political group represented on the Committee and, to do that whilst respecting the Council's political balance whilst not being limited by strict political proportionality. An alternative composition could comprise: 2 Liberal Democrat Group members, 1 Labour and Co-operative Party Group member, 1 Oxfordshire Alliance Group member, 1 Green Party Group member.

12. The Panel will elect its Chair and Deputy Chair at its first meeting. In the Chair's absence, the Deputy Chair will preside over the meeting. In line with Part 6.1B(7) of the Council's Constitution, substitution will not apply where any member appointed by the Committee is unable to attend.

Meetings

13. The Panel will meet up to four times, each meeting lasting no more than two hours. All meetings will be held in private.

Meeting 1:

- Election of Chair and Deputy Chair and agreement of lines of enquiry. During this meeting, the Panel will identify groups that it wishes to receive evidence from.

Meeting 2:

- Consideration of written submissions from interested parties. Anyone may write to the Panel c/o scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk to express an interest in providing submissions.

Meeting 3:

- Consideration of oral submissions at County Hall if members have identified, through their consideration of written submissions, that they wish to have the opportunity to ask questions of those who have earlier provided written evidence.

Meeting 4:

- Consideration by members of responses or clarifications arising from earlier meetings.

14. Following completion of its work, the Panel will draft a final report setting out findings, an overview of evidence received, lessons learned, and any recommendations to Cabinet proposed by the Panel. The report will be presented to the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee for endorsement.
15. The Panel will disband following the Committee's consideration of the final report unless further work is commissioned.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

16. The Panel will seek to explore how the Council can create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential as well as working with local partners for societal benefit. These would both contribute to making Oxfordshire greener, fairer, and healthier.

Financial Implications

17. There are no additional financial implications that arise from the work of the Panel other than the potential for councillors to claim for travel expenses.

Comments checked by:

Tim Chapple, Strategic Financing & Investment Manager,
tim.chapple@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

18. The requirement for councils in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees, and their legal powers, are set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. How overview and scrutiny committees function at Oxfordshire County Council is set out in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution. Part 9 of the Constitution includes the Code of Conduct as well as, at Part 9.2, the Protocol on Members' Rights and Responsibilities. The implications of these, and other legislation, is set out in the main body of the report.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar, Head of Legal & Governance, jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Staff Implications

19. There is capacity within the Scrutiny team to service this Panel.

Consultations

20. None arising from this report. The Panel will invite interested parties to contact the Scrutiny team at scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk in order to submit written contributions for the Panel's consideration in line with the scope set out above.

Anita Bradley
Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

Contact Officer: Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer
richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk

February 2026

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Agenda Item 8

The Committee's attention is drawn to topics it has previously raised as being worth considering at a future meeting of the Committee.

Recognising that this year's Committee cannot bind next year's Committee, it is recommended that members seek the advice of the Director of Children's Services and provisionally prioritise and timetable items below or others that may be raised at the meeting. This is subject to future amendment and additions.

- Admissions arrangements
- Apprenticeships
- Best Start Centres
- Care leavers and the transition between children's and adult services
- Child Sex Exploitation
- Children's Homes
- Complaints and compliments data
- Coproduction in Children's Services – how is this embedded across service areas
- Curriculum Policy Review
- CWCF Not in Education, Employment or Training
- Early Help
- Harm Outside the Home
- Health and Wellbeing of Looked After Children
- Local authority influence with academy schools
- Oxfordshire Education Inclusion Partnership Strategy
- School Improvement
- School Place Planning and Delivery
- Section 19 Monitoring Report
- Support for Adoptive Parents
- Trauma-informed education
- Unaccompanied Asylum Seekers
- Validated Education Data
- Young Carers

Annual or otherwise reports

- Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Partnership
- The Virtual School
- Adopt Thames Valley
- Youth Justice Plan
- Children and Young People's Plan
- Home Care Service Inspection
- Local Area SEND Partnership Inspection
- ILACS inspection

Meetings of the Committee are currently scheduled for:

Friday 27 March 2026
Tuesday 23 June 2026
Tuesday 22 September 2026
Tuesday 24 September 2026
Tuesday 19 January 2027
Tuesday 27 January 2027

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**Recommendation Tracker
Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk

The recommendation update tracker enables the Committee to monitor progress accepted recommendations. The tracker is updated with recommendations accepted by Cabinet. Once a recommendation has been updated, it will be shaded green and reported into the next meeting of the Committee, after which it will be removed from the tracker. If the recommendation will be update in the form of a separate item, it will be shaded yellow.

KEY	Due to Cabinet	With Cabinet	Complete
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Recommendations:

Meeting date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
21-Nov-25	Virtual School Report	1. That the Council should continue to work on improving attendance of those who are part of the Virtual School.	Lisa Lyons; Delia Mann; Charlotte Davey	Submitted to Cabinet January
		2. That the Council should continue to highlight the work of the Virtual school with governing boards and social workers to ensure they are well informed and engaged in supporting the education of children in care.		
21-Nov-25	Fostering	1. That the Council should commit to 'Fostering Friendly Oxfordshire' and continue to work with district councils and other key stakeholders to achieve this.	Lisa Lyons; Annette Perrington; Clare Pike	Submitted to Cabinet January

KEY	Due to Cabinet	With Cabinet	Complete
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Meeting date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update/response
		2. That the Council should explore in more detail the possibility of a council tax-related offer for foster carers.		
21-Nov-25 Page 28	Attainment	1. That the Council should adapt its protocol so that local members are notified when Cabinet members and senior officers visit schools within their division.	Lisa Lyons; Annette Perrington; Kim Wilson	Submitted to Cabinet January
		2. That the Council should celebrate successes and share best practice across the family of schools in the area.		
		3. That the Council, in developing the Oxfordshire Education and Inclusion Strategy, should ensure that sufficient attention is given to child safeguarding and protection as well as the curriculum review.		

Action Tracker
Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Liz Brighthouse, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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KEY	Delayed	In progress	Complete
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Actions:

Meeting date	Item	Action	Lead	Update/response
There are no outstanding action items				

**Recommendation Update Tracker
Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee**

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE, Chair | Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer, richard.doney@oxfordshire.gov.uk

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KEY	Update Pending	Update in Item	Updated
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Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
16-Sep-25	Update of Children's Homes	That the Council should encourage Ofsted to ensure the registration period for children's homes is as short as possible and thereby expedite the process of placing children in registered settings.	Lisa Lyons; Jean Kelly; Charlotte Davey	Progress update to be provided
16-Sep-25	s.19 of Education Act	1. That, notwithstanding the complexity of the processes being set out, the Council should ensure that the process chart at Annexe B is re-designed to make it clearer and easier to follow. 2. That the Council should highlight how there will be sufficient resource – both financial and practical – to ensure the s.19 approach and Pathway of Action can function adequately.	Lisa Lyons	Progress update to be provided

KEY	Update Pending	Update in Item	Updated
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Cabinet Response Date	Item	Recommendation	Lead	Update
16-Sep-25	Home to School Transport	1. That the Council should work at pace to organise personal transport budgets with appropriate flexibility to take account of individual circumstances.	Lisa Lyons; Paul Fermer; Vic Kurzeja	Progress update to be provided
		2. That the Council should ensure regular review of the policy is to mean 'annual', subject to legislative changes.		
18-Nov-25	School Catering Services and Corporate Cleaning Services	1. That the Council should outline the specific measures it has taken to ensure that rural schools are protected and that all schools will receive high quality catering services.	Lorna Baxter; Vic Kurzeja	Progress update to be provided
		2. That the Council should set out the specific steps it will take to ensure that the rights and interests of existing staff members will be protected, and that trade unions will be consulted and engaged throughout the process.		
18-Nov-25	Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children's Partnership Annual Report	1. That the Council should deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents and carers, particularly regarding online threats and should consider how best to do this.	Lisa Lyons	Progress update to be provided as part of 2025/26 annual report

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