OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Notice of a Meeting

Performance & Corporate Services Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Friday, 18 September 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 Glynis Phillips		
Deputy Chair:	Councillor Ian Middleton		
Councillors:	Brad Baines	Tom Greenaway	Vacancy
	Ron Batstone	Kieron Mallon	
	Andrew Gant	Judy Roberts	

Date of Next Meeting: *4 December 2026*

For more information about this Committee please contact:
Committee Officer: *Scrutiny Team*
Email: *E-Mail: scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk*

Martin Reeves, OBE
Chief Executive

September 2026

What does this Committee review or scrutinise?

The purpose of the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is (i) To review and scrutinise the performance of the Council and to provide a focused review of: (a) Corporate performance and directorate performance and financial reporting (b) Budget scrutiny (ii) To monitor the performance of the Council by means of effective key performance indicators, review of key action plans and obligations and through direct access to service managers, Cabinet Members and partners; (iii) To exercise the statutory right to call-in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by or on behalf of the Cabinet;

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 3 working days 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 up to 4 times a year or more. 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 9 - 22)

The Committee is recommended to **APPROVE** the minutes of the meeting held on 12 June 2026 and to receive information arising from them.

4. Petitions and Public Address

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

Requests to present a petition must be submitted no later than 9am ten working days before the meeting, i.e. 04/09/2026

Requests to speak must be submitted no later than 9am three working days before the meeting, i.e. 15/09/2026.

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.

5. Committee Forward Work Plan (Pages 23 - 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.

The current Cabinet Forward Plan can be found online at:

https://mycouncil.oxfordshire.gov.uk/mgListPlanItems.aspx?PlanId=494&RP=115

6. Responses to Scrutiny Recommendations (Pages 27 - 30)

Attached is the Cabinet response to the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee report on the Community Asset Transfer (CAT) Policy. The Committee is asked to **NOTE** the response.

7. **Devolution Update** (Pages 31 - 36)

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, Lorna Baxter, Deputy Chief Executive (S.151 Officer), and Rose Sutton, Interim Programme Manager (Devolution) have been invited to present an update report on Devolution.

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.

8. **Integrating Social Value** (Pages 37 - 46)

Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Lorna Baxter, Deputy Chief Executive (s.151 officer) and Max Button, Commercial Excellence Lead have been invited to present a report on the Council's integration of Social Value principles.

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.

9. **AI Usage and Benefits** (Pages 47 - 52)

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, Kit Collingwood, Interim Director of Technology and Customer Experience, and Alastair Read, Head of IT Services, have been invited to present a report on the Council's usage of AI and its benefits.

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.

EXEMPT ITEM

The Committee is RECOMMENDED that the public be excluded for the duration of item 10 in the Agenda since it is likely that if they were present during this item there would be disclosure of exempt information as defined in Part I of Schedule 12A to the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended) and specified in relation to the respective items in the Agenda and since it is considered that, in all the circumstances of each case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information.

THE REPORTS RELATING TO THE EXEMPT ITEMS HAVE NOT BEEN MADE PUBLIC AND SHOULD BE REGARDED AS STRICTLY PRIVATE TO MEMBERS AND OFFICERS ENTITLED TO RECEIVE THEM.

10. **Corporate IT Security** (Pages 53 - 60)

Councillor Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Resources, Alastair Read, Head of IT Services, and Asher Sims have been invited to present a report on the Council's corporate IT security.

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.

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.

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OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 12 June 2026 commencing at 10.01 am and finishing at 1.09 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:	Councillor Glynis Phillips - in the Chair Councillor Ian Middleton (Deputy Chair) Councillor Brad Baines Councillor Ron Batstone Councillor Liam Walker Councillor Evans (as sub for Councillor Mallon) Councillor Roberts (as sub for Councillor Shiri) Councillor Smith (as sub for Councillor Greenaway)
Other Members in Attendance:	Councillor Neil Fawcett (online) Councillor Dan Levy Councillor Laura Gordon
Officers:	Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance Verity Royle, Planning and Reporting Manager Nicholas Glover, Head of Future Economy 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.

24/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS
(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies for absence were received from the following:

- Cllr Greenaway (for whom Cllr Smith was substituting)
- Cllr Mallon (for whom Cllr Evans was substituting)
- Cllr Shiri (for whom Cllr Roberts was substituting)

25/26 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS
(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

26/26 MINUTES
(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meetings of the 17 April 2026 and 12 May 2026 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record.

27/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS
(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

28/26 BUSINESS MANAGEMENT AND MONITORING REPORT (FOCUSING ON THE FIRE AND RESCUE SERVICE)
(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Fawcett, Cabinet Member for Resources, and Cllr Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services, Rob MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety, Kathy Wilcox, Head of Corporate Finance, and Verity Royle, Planning and Reporting Manager attended the committee to present the Business Management and Monitoring Report with a focus on the Fire and Rescue Service.

The Head of Corporate Finance introduced the report which brought together finance, performance and risk updates for Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue and Community Safety as part of the Committee's rolling updates.

The service reported a small overspend of £0.5m against a budget of £32.6m for 2025/26, driven by a £0.6m overspend in Fire and Rescue, partly offset by a £0.1m underspend in Trading Standards. Reserves of £3.4m were held at year end, largely earmarked for vehicles and equipment.

Performance across all measures was reported as strong, with indicators rated green and continued delivery against key priorities, including community safety, health and tackling inequality. Capital expenditure of £1.3m on fleet and equipment was also noted, funded primarily from service reserves.

Speaking to the financial aspects of the report, members sought more information on the Carterton Community Safety Centre. Robin MacDougall, Chief Fire Officer and Director of Community Safety, explained that the service was operating from a temporary fire station. A site had been secured through a Section 106 agreement for a new permanent fire station, with plans developed and some capital funding identified. However, insufficient funding was in place to begin the project, and the service was exploring options to secure the additional capital required. This remained challenging and had to be balanced against maintaining the current fire crew response. The service was keeping the project under review, including ways to reduce build costs and increase available capital funding.

Members also sought explanation of the firefighters' New Dimension grant. The Chief Fire Officer explained that a national resilience function had been established across UK fire and rescue services, covering capabilities such as urban search and rescue, hazardous chemical incidents and major flooding. Oxfordshire hosted two units: a high-volume pumping unit at Banbury and a detection, identification and monitoring team at Bicester serving the Thames Valley. It was confirmed that the funding did not support Kennington fire station but was adequate for the work undertaken.

For context, the Chief Fire Officer gave a presentation on performance and proposed changes to the service's delivery model. The Fire and Rescue Service cover model was intended to better align resources with demand, which was concentrated during the day and early evening. Fire engine availability did not currently align with the busiest periods, and response times had been increasing nationally and locally, making change necessary.

He reminded the Committee of the breadth of activity undertaken by the service, noting that during 2025/26 it had attended more than 6,000 incidents. These included nearly 1,500 fires, 140 flooding incidents, 83 animal rescues, more than 118 incidents assisting other agencies, almost 350 road traffic collisions and over 50 hazardous chemical incidents. Although there was no statutory duty to respond to flooding, the Council had taken the decision nearly two decades ago to provide that service and fund it accordingly.

There remained a mismatch between demand and on-call fire engine availability, with daytime and early evening demand almost two and a half times higher than at night. The service required 15 fire engines for adequate countywide cover, with additional measures when availability fell below that level. Daytime availability often came close to this threshold, and bank holidays and school holidays created particular pressure, recently requiring significant overtime to maintain cover.

Changes proposed through the Fire and Rescue cover model were considered essential to create a more sustainable service and improve response times. Although overall performance remained strong in several areas, current response times were below target. The service aimed to reach 80% of incidents within 11 minutes and 95% within 14 minutes, but current performance was 70% and 84% respectively. Average response time was 9 minutes and 15 seconds and had steadily increased over four years. Oxfordshire was also performing below comparable rural services, which was a concern.

In relation to the consultation, recommendations had been made not to close the three fire stations originally identified. Further work was instead being brought forward on the final design of shift pattern changes, intended to move more resources into daytime periods to meet demand and improve response times. Staff working groups involving the service and the Fire Brigades Union had begun that day, aiming to agree a new shift pattern over the coming months. The timescales suggested proposals coming to Cabinet in autumn 2026 and implementation in 2027.

On the overall adequacy of funding, the Chief Fire Officer said the cover model aimed to move away from a traditional approach heavily reliant on on-call provision and frequent operational intervention. The current model created daily challenges, with officers continually addressing the symptoms of an arrangement that was no longer effective enough. The proposed changes were intended to use resources differently, creating a more sustainable model, reducing reactive adjustments, lowering overtime costs and releasing financial capacity for further improvement.

The Chief Fire Officer also reiterated his view that fire and rescue services would benefit from greater funding, noting that additional investment would provide more flexibility and support further improvements while maintaining resilience. However, he emphasised that there was always a balance to be struck between efficiency and resilience, as removing too much capacity from the system could reduce the service's ability to respond to pressures.

Members asked about budget planning for the forthcoming year and whether savings targets had been set for the directorate or Fire and Rescue Service. Officers explained that the directorate was involved in wider budget discussions and, like other services, was considering efficiencies. However, the Fire and Rescue Service faced particular circumstances because local government reorganisation (LGR) could require it to move out of the County Council in future, as had happened in Northamptonshire and Cumbria.

The Director of Financial and Commercial Services confirmed that, while all directors were contributing to work on savings options, no specific savings target had been set for the Fire and Rescue Service. He said that work was under way to assess the likely financial envelope for the service if it were to leave the County Council on 1 April 2028, including the costs, potential burdens and opportunities that might arise, and that this would inform more detailed planning in due course.

Members asked whether the service benchmarked Oxfordshire's incident profile against comparable fire and rescue services and whether local trends reflected wider patterns, particularly house fires, lithium-ion battery fires and fires involving e-bikes or vapes. The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that benchmarking was undertaken nationally and against similar services, including Warwickshire, Gloucestershire and Buckinghamshire. Dwelling fires had reduced, and Oxfordshire's rate, measured against population, remained very low compared with other areas.

The service was seeing increased challenges associated with lithium-ion battery fires, particularly at recycling and waste sites, and recent incidents had been linked to inappropriate disposal. There were growing concerns around scooter fires, often associated with products not meeting required safety standards or being charged unsafely. Work to raise public awareness of these risks was being undertaken both locally and nationally.

There were no unusual trends in Oxfordshire compared with similar counties. However, he noted that benchmarking on response times needed to take account of local geography and funding, as Oxfordshire's rural nature created different operational challenges from more densely populated metropolitan areas.

Based on the fact BMMR performance data did not suggest a need for a new operating model, whilst other data did, the adequacy of the BMMR measures was queried by members.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that the service monitored a broader range of performance indicators than those included in the BMMR to assess overall performance and identify changes needed for improvement. There was a balance between providing sufficient Fire and Rescue information and maintaining a manageable set of measures within the wider corporate performance framework. More detailed information was reported to the Cabinet Member, while the published measures reflected the aspects most relevant to the public, particularly response times and prevention work.

The Cabinet Member for Community Safety acknowledged the point and agreed it would be helpful to reflect more clearly that the published figures resulted from considerable operational work to move resources around the system to maintain cover. Without these interventions, performance would have been significantly worse, and such action had cost implications, including increased overtime. These issues formed part of constructive discussions with staff and the Fire Brigades Union on improving the operating model.

Members asked whether response times were monitored in more granular detail than simply the countywide average, including by district, urban and rural areas, type of appliance and type of incident, and also enquired how far the service took account of heritage assets in planning and response arrangements.

The Chief Fire Officer confirmed that the service monitored response times in greater detail, including by on-call and whole-time appliances, district and incident type, such as dwelling fires and road traffic collisions. These differences were reflected in the annual report, which showed, for example, quicker response times in Oxford due to greater whole-time staff availability. While crews would take account of an incident's nature when responding, the service did not formally categorise incidents in the same way as the police and did not hold data showing intentionally different response speeds by incident type.

In response to a question on heritage assets, the Chief Fire Officer recognised that heritage risk was significant and was included within the Community Risk Management Plan. This involved assessing risks to important buildings, ensuring fire protection and prevention measures were in place, and making sure crews were familiar with those sites. A strategic risk group with the University had been established to ensure a shared understanding of the highest-risk heritage buildings and that training and planning reflected this.

Members asked whether closure of Rewley Road and Kidlington Fire Station remained under consideration.

The Chief Fire Officer explained that, as part of the consultation, the service had considered whether a new fire station could be developed that would enable closure of Rewley Road and Kennington. This remained one of the options under review and that potential sites for a new station were still being explored. Another option was to redevelop the existing Rewley Road site as a smaller station.
The service was continuing to assess whether a larger site outside central Oxford might provide a better long-term solution. While acknowledging that this could have implications for response times into the city, he emphasised that major incidents in

Oxford would require a wider weight of response, and that effective risk information, specialist training and an understanding of the city's specific risks would remain central to the service's approach.

Following questions about the granularity of information and future plans, the Chief Fire Officer confirmed that work on the next Community Risk Management Plan had already been undertaken, although discussions were ongoing about its format and timescale in light of LGR. He explained that, whether through a shorter interim plan or an adapted version of the current arrangements, there would continue to be a comprehensive plan in place to direct the service's work.

For major heritage assets such as Blenheim Palace, the service had specific plans in place covering a range of fire scenarios, supported by regular training exercises. These included arrangements for water supply and salvage, as well as for protecting heritage items alongside the preservation of life and property.

Members asked about the challenges arising from LGR. The Chief Fire Officer explained that Government devolution proposals indicated that, where a mayoral authority existed, fire and rescue services would sit alongside policing under the mayoral structure, rather than being disaggregated across unitary councils. If LGR in Oxfordshire resulted in two or three unitary authorities, the Fire and Rescue Service would continue to operate across the wider geography as a standalone service. Surrey provided a relevant example, as it was preparing for its County Council fire and rescue service to become a separate combined authority serving new unitary areas. In places without a mayoral authority, this type of combined authority model was already well established, with Royal Berkshire cited as an example.

In response to questions about two-unitary or three-unitary models, particularly if a new council geography crossed existing fire authority boundaries, he acknowledged potential governance and transition complexity. Officers were discussing options with neighbouring fire and rescue services, including Royal Berkshire and Buckinghamshire, and with Government officials. No final clarity had been provided on the governance model, including whether future strategic authority arrangements might encompass fire and rescue responsibilities. However, the service was working through planning scenarios and was confident that workable arrangements could be developed once the final local government structure was known.

Members asked about the ongoing discussions with the Fire Brigades Union and the risk of potential industrial action, as well as the financial position facing the directorate in the context of wider budget pressures.
The Chief Fire Officer said the risks associated with significant transformational change affecting terms and conditions had been recognised from the outset and reflected in risk registers. However, Fire Brigades Union representatives and the workforce had engaged constructively, understood the service's challenges and were working with management to identify solutions that would avoid industrial action. The joint working groups were intended to find an approach that met the new operating model's needs while taking account of staff views and concerns.

The Committee **AGREED** to make recommendations to Cabinet around:

1. More routine reporting on the Fire and Rescue Service
2. Further attention to heritage buildings within response modelling
3. Better information on firefighter recruitment
4. Greater transparency on LGR costs
5. Earlier scrutiny input into the next Community Risk Management Plan

29/26 COMMERCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE

(Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation, and Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services, presented an update report on the progress of the Council's Commercial Strategy.

Introducing the report, the Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation explained that the strategy had been intended to ensure that the Council's commercial activity added value to the organisation, supported wider policy objectives, and generated income where appropriate. He highlighted the importance of ensuring that contracts delivered financial and social value, supporting community and environmental priorities through procurement, and identifying commercial opportunities that could support the delivery of services.

The Director of Financial and Commercial Services reported that reasonable progress had been made since the strategy had been approved, although progress had been slower than hoped because of the need to undertake foundational work. The Council had reviewed its operating model, redesigned relevant service structures, strengthened commercial and procurement capacity, and begun to improve contract management arrangements.

Committee members questioned the rationale for the acquisition of the Castle Quarter, noting that many members had been unaware of the initiative because of commercial confidentiality. Questions were asked about the total cost, the source of funding, the relationship between the acquisition and the sale of County Hall, and the consistency of decision making in relation to property assets in the same area.
Officers explained that the opportunity to acquire the leasehold interest had arisen and had been assessed from both a place-shaping and commercial perspective. The Committee was advised that the total capital investment approved by Cabinet was £34 million, covering the acquisition and associated capital requirements. Officers stated that, after borrowing and operating costs, the acquisition was expected to generate a minimum net surplus of £550,000 per year, with the potential for this to increase through commercial management of the asset.

Members asked about the risks associated with the acquisition, including reliance on footfall, rental income, occupancy levels, and the performance of existing and future tenants. Officers explained that due diligence had been undertaken, that market advice had been received, and that a reserve would be established from expected early-year surpluses to provide a buffer if income levels were lower than anticipated. The Committee was advised that four vacant units were expected to be occupied within 18 months and that the Council had protection in relation to income from those units for the next two years.

Members expressed concern that the projected annual surplus represented a relatively low yield against the level of investment and questioned whether the Council was becoming a significant commercial landlord. Officers clarified that the Council was not permitted to borrow solely for commercial gain and that the acquisition had been justified by its wider place-shaping purpose. The business case had needed to demonstrate that the investment would pay for itself and would not become a burden on the revenue budget.

Members also sought further detail on the Council's vision for the Castle Quarter, the proposed letting profile, the approach to asset management, and the governance arrangements for decisions involving significant levels of expenditure. Officers stated that the acquisition fitted within the wider place strategy for Oxford, including the development of the West End and the role of the Castle Quarter as a gateway into the city centre. In addition, external asset management and property management expertise had been secured to support the operational management of the site.

The Committee discussed how the Council balanced commercial thinking with wider social, environmental and economic considerations. Officers explained that value for money was the key driver and that this included the outcomes the Council was seeking to achieve, rather than simply reducing costs. Members noted the importance of social value, support for small and medium-sized enterprises, environmental impacts, and the wider local economy.

Members asked how the commercial strategy would influence the Council's approach to LGR. The Cabinet Member stated that the Council could not bind any future authority or authorities, but that councils across Oxfordshire were moving in broadly similar directions by seeking commercial approaches that were financially sensible and delivered social value. Members requested greater clarity on how the strategy would inform the Council's contribution to LGR discussions and future decision making.

Members welcomed the emphasis on continuous improvement and efficiency but asked whether the use of technology, including an internal AI agent, would lead to internal savings as well as savings from third-party spend and contracts. Officers explained that investment had been made in the commercial and procurement team to establish the operating model and strengthen contract management. It was reported that, as processes became embedded and technology developed, opportunities would be considered to reduce administrative demand and make better use of staffing resources through natural turnover and attrition.

The Committee asked for examples of improved contract management delivering financial or service benefits. Officers explained that the Council had developed a contract management framework and was assessing platinum contracts against it. Examples given included work with the M Group contract and the System C adults' and children's social care line of business systems, where relationships and contract management arrangements were being strengthened.

Members asked how collaboration with services, district councils and other partners had progressed. Officers explained that the new operating model had supported closer working with services through a business partnering approach and that collaboration with district and city councils had been strengthened through LGR discussions. The Committee was advised that work was taking place to review contracts and future procurement activity across local authority partners ahead of vesting.

Members expressed disappointment that the commercial dashboard had been delayed, noting that it was important for monitoring performance against key performance indicators. Officers acknowledged the delay and stated that the dashboard was expected to be delivered within the current financial year, although a firm date was not yet available.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following recommendations around the following to Cabinet:

1. Better balance between the need for commercial confidentiality with the need for transparency and effective scrutiny, particularly in relation to significant commercial decisions.
2. Provision of explicit information on collaboration with district and city council partners, including how this work supported procurement, contract management and local government reorganisation.
3. The development of the commercial dashboard to be brought forward as soon as possible and that a clear timetable for delivery was provided to the Committee.
4. Practical examples of how implementation of the Commercial Strategy had improved the quality, performance and value for money of Council contracts.
5. Greater clarity on how the Commercial Strategy informed the Council's approach to LGR and the options being discussed with partner authorities.

The Committee also requested:

- That, where appropriate and subject to commercial confidentiality, further information was provided on the Castle Quarter acquisition, including the Council's vision for the site, letting assumptions, risk profile, governance arrangements and opportunities for earlier scrutiny of major commercial decisions.

30/26 SHAPING OXFORDSHIRE'S FUTURE ECONOMY

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Gordon, Cabinet Member for Environment and Economy, and Nicholas Glover, Head of Future Economy attended to present an update report on Shaping Oxfordshire's Future Economy. The Head of Future Economy highlighted to members his interest as Interim Managing Director of Enterprise Oxfordshire.

Introducing the report, the Head of Future Economy explained that Oxfordshire had a strong economy, highly significant research and innovation assets, a skilled workforce, and extremely high employment rates. However, he advised that productivity remained a key challenge and that the benefits of innovation-led growth had not flowed evenly across the county. Persistent deprivation in some areas, pressures in the foundational economy, difficulties in retaining and scaling businesses, and misalignment between housing, employment and transport infrastructure were highlighted as key challenges for the county's economy.

The Committee heard that, given the uncertainty created by LGR, devolution, the proposed development corporation and wider institutional change, officers were not proposing a traditional long-term economic strategy . Instead, the focus had shifted to an investment plan for the short to medium term, intended to support businesses and residents while longer-term governance and spatial decisions were resolved.

The Head of Future Economy stated that the emerging investment pipeline was approximately £150 million, although no final decisions had been taken. He suggested that Enterprise Oxfordshire could provide a platform for delivery and for convening public, private and academic partners, but that some interventions might be better delivered by local government or other partners. The intention was to take proposals to Cabinet in July, with further development of interventions expected in September and beyond.

Members sought more detail about the leadership of Enterprise Oxfordshire. The Head of Future Economy clarified that he had been appointed Interim Managing Director of Enterprise Oxfordshire following the departure of the previous Chief Executive. His interim contract was due to end in July, although it was likely to be extended. Recruitment for a Managing Director was underway, with final interviews expected on 29 June and a recommendation due to be considered by the shareholder committee on 14 July. The Committee was advised that a candidate had also been identified for the role of Chair of Enterprise Oxfordshire and would be recommended to the Shareholder Committee for approval.

Members asked for greater clarity on the competing views referred to in the report around economic development, particularly in relation to the statement that developing a traditional economic strategy was exceptionally challenging. The Head of Future Economy explained that there were differing views across Oxfordshire about the appropriate economic model, including spatial questions around housing, commercial development, growth locations and the extent to which the benefits of Oxford's universities and spin-outs should be spread across the county and beyond. Members emphasised the importance of transparency and asked that the specific views of organisations be made clear where possible. The Head of Future Economy referred to LGR submissions as public documents that set out different perspectives on the county's future economic model. The Cabinet Member for Economy and Environment added that the Council was operating in a challenging sequencing environment, with LGR and devolution processes running in parallel, but notwithstanding that, immediate action was still required to support inclusive growth and address persistent deprivation.

The Committee sought tangible examples of interventions that could improve productivity. The Head of Future Economy identified housing and public transport as major determinants, alongside inward investment, business support, high street support, support for high-growth businesses, and upskilling programmes. He noted that improving access to training, including through satellite provision with further education providers, could help address skills barriers. He cautioned, however, that local interventions would represent a relatively small proportion of the wider economy and that national policy would remain a significant factor.

Members asked about the impact of a previous £500,000 investment in mapping mobile phone signal across the county and whether any concrete steps had followed to improve productivity and connectivity. The Head of Future Economy advised that he was not aware of the detail but would take the question away and provide a written response to the Committee. It was confirmed that the response would be shared with all Committee members.

Members raised concerns that housing and transport decisions had not always aligned with employment opportunities. The Committee discussed the example of the former X35 bus service, which had connected communities including Faringdon and Stanford in the Vale with employment sites such as Harwell and Didcot. Members considered that the loss of such services made it harder for residents in growing communities to access good employment opportunities. The Head of Future Economy accepted that the point was fair and advised that these issues were live officer-level discussions within the Economy & Place teams. Members similarly raised concerns that rail and bus planning appeared insufficiently integrated and noted the need for greater synergy between public transport planning and economic development objectives.

Concerns were also raised that the Science Vale Movement and Place Plan had given limited attention to buses and that there was no equivalent bus plan integrated with the rail strategy. Members also discussed bus franchising and considered that it could be important for developing an integrated public transport approach. The Cabinet Member advised that decisions such as bus franchising might be best taken by the authority that emerged from the devolution process. She noted that the Council's ability to plan was complicated by LGR and devolution running in parallel, and that the productivity and investment plan was intended to focus on what could be achieved within the remaining lifetime of the current Council. The Head of Future Economy advised that some housing and spatial planning issues were unlikely to be resolved in the immediate future and would be influenced by LGR, the establishment of any development corporation, and the development of a spatial development strategy. International investors would take comfort from the Council's rail plans and secured investment, but acknowledged that more work was needed on transport integration.

Members raised concerns that the report appeared to assume that growth was essential, without sufficiently testing whether this remained appropriate in a climate-constrained world. It was suggested that sustainability and climate resilience were treated as constraints rather than fundamental limits, and that greater attention should be given to total emissions, resource consumption, climate adaptation risks, wellbeing, health inequality, biodiversity recovery and carbon reduction.
The Cabinet Member stated that the Council considered growth to be essential, provided it was the right kind of growth: good, inclusive and green growth that enabled residents who had not shared in Oxfordshire's prosperity to benefit from it.

The Head of Future Economy acknowledged that productivity and growth had sometimes been conflated, and clarified that the intended focus was economic development: improving residents' quality of life and standards of living rather than pursuing growth at any cost.

The Head of Future Economy advised that environmental sustainability, biodiversity net gain and related workstreams were important and had their own processes and resource bases. He stated that principles such as doughnut economics and future generations considerations should be applied when designing specific interventions, including business support and skills programmes. The Cabinet Member added that the approach aimed to address the way housing and employment patterns had contributed to long commutes, affordability pressures and exclusion from opportunities, and that the environmental and wellbeing benefits of this should be made more explicit.

Members expressed concern that economic development had not always appeared to receive sufficient priority or resource within the Council, and that reports needed clearer substance, measurable objectives and accountability. Examples were raised including the A40, RAF Brize Norton, Bicester Motion, rail connectivity, tourism and major local economic opportunities. The Head of Future Economy agreed that economic development was under-resourced across the county and that capacity, data and intelligence needed to be strengthened. He advised that Enterprise Oxfordshire had identified capacity to recruit a Head of Inward Investment and sector leads, and that the investment plan should include clear objectives, key results and measures so that progress could be monitored and challenged.

Members noted that farming and the rural economy had not been referenced by the report in line with its contribution to the local economy. Agriculture occupied a significant proportion of Oxfordshire's land area and was important to productivity, even if not always framed in terms of growth. The Committee considered this a significant omission.

The Committee **AGREED** to make recommendations to Cabinet in relation to

1. Giving greater priority to economic development, supported by stronger use of data and intelligence, clearer objectives, and measurable outcomes.
2. Including in the forthcoming Oxfordshire Investment and Productivity Plan specific examples of how productivity related to local residents' lives, including practical examples of green growth and inclusive economic development.
3. Addressing the misalignment between public transport and employment locations, and consider whether rail and bus planning required greater integration and synergy.
4. Ensuring the forthcoming Oxfordshire Investment and Productivity Plan explicitly evaluated alternative economic frameworks, including wellbeing economy, community wealth building and post-growth approaches, and demonstrated how any proposed growth would be compatible with Oxfordshire's climate, biodiversity and nature recovery commitments.
5. That the Oxfordshire Investment and Productivity Plan addresses farming and agriculture issues

The Committee supported the proposal to convene a group of existing elected members to agree delivery principles and mechanisms for economic development across Oxfordshire, and suggested that this should have appropriate status within the Council, such as through a Cabinet advisory committee.

The Head of Future Economy agreed to provide a written response on the outcomes and next steps following the previous investment in mapping mobile phone signal across the county. The response was to be shared with all Committee members.

31/26 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN
(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed work programme but, in the event that Council gave it power to consider LGR issues and the government announced its 'minded to' decision in July, the Committee requested to replace the BMMR item with an LGR update.

32/26 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS
(Agenda No. 9)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to the reports on:

- The Business Management and Monitoring Report (Public Health)
- Parking Permits
- Draft Social Value Policy

.... in the Chair

Date of signing ....

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Work Programme
Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Glynis Phillips, Chair | Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Manager
tom.hudson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Topic	Relevant strategic priorities	Purpose	Type	Lead Presenters
18 September 2026				
Wider Social Value	All	To review the Council's progress on drawing together its strands of work around Social Value into a single, coherent policy	Overview	Cllr Levy; Lorna Baxter, Max Button
AI benefits	Underpins all	To review the Council's use of AI: its cost, its usage, the mitigations against dangers, the monitoring of value. An in-depth look at the use of AI within the customer service centre is requested.	Overview	Cllr Fawcett; Kit Collingwood, Alastair Read
IT and IT security update	Underpins all	To receive a healthcheck and update on the work of the IT team and IT security	Overview	Cllr Fawcett; Alastair Read, Asher Sims
Devolution Update	All	To receive an update on devolution proposals in light of the Council's position in relation to working with Swindon, and	Overview	Cllr Fawcett, Lorna Baxter, Rose Sutton

		recent announcements from Central Government		
04 December 2026				
Budget	All	To review the proposed budget prior to its consideration by Cabinet and, ultimately, Council. To include additional information on the decision-making process for the Watlington Relief Road.	Scrutiny	All Cabinet members and directors invited
15 January 2027				
Marmot Integration	Fairer, Healthier	To review the Council's progress in implementing a system-wide approach towards achieving the Council's Marmot principles concerning health inequalities	Overview	Cllr Gregory, Ansaf Azhar, Karen Fuller, Lisa Lyons
Business Management Monitoring Report, with a focus on Children, Education and Families	All	To review performance, assess progress against strategic priorities, and hold decision-makers accountable for effective service delivery and resource use. The review will take a focused look at the Children, Education and Families service	Scrutiny	Cllr Gaul; Lisa Lyons
Botley West Solar Farm	Greener	To appraise the business case of the Botley West Solar Farm proposals.	Overview	Cllr Levy, Ian Dyson
Budget	All	Spare spot to revisit any specific issues not fully dealt with in Dec	Scrutiny	Cllr Levy, Lorna Baxter, others TBC

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

16 April 2027				
Business Management Monitoring Report, with a focus on Economy and Place, and Environment and Highways	All	To review performance, assess progress against strategic priorities, and hold decision-makers accountable for effective service delivery and resource use. The review will take a focused look at the Economy and Place, and Environment and Highways services	Scrutiny	Cllr Epps, Leffman and Gordon; Robin Rogers; Paul Fermer

OXFORDSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

Sub-groups				
Name	**Relevant strategic priorities**	**Description**	**Outcomes**	**Members**
There are currently no sub-groups				

Briefings/Other					
Date	**Topic**	**Relevant strategic priorities**	**Description**	**Outcomes**	**Presenters**
There are no scheduled member briefings					

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested[1] and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.

This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.

Issue: Community Asset Transfer Policy

Lead Cabinet Member(s): **Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Property and Transformation**

Date response requested:[2] **21 April 2026**

Response to report:

Enter text here.

[1] Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received
[2] Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

Response to recommendations

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)
1. That the Cabinet amends the CAT policy to make explicit reference to the sale of land	Partially accepted	The policy as already makes explicit reference to the sale of land, defining in section 1.0 CAT as “transferring the ownership of land or buildings”. However, on the internet page where CAT / Community Leases are linked, we will give a further brief explanation which defines each term, which will make another explicit reference to this.
2. That the Cabinet provides in the CAT policy fuller explanation of the approach taken in relation to transfers of dilapidated buildings	Partially accepted	The condition of the building that we transfer via a CAT will be considered as part of the terms of the transfer / sale. Our approach to the state of the building would be dependent on the terms of the sale. With a Community Lease, this would be different as we would only lease out assets if they were in a fit state.
3. That the Cabinet provides within the policy greater detail of the legal framework and process surrounding the transfer of ownership	Rejected	The CAT Policy already references the legal framework that enables us to proceed with a CAT (found in Section 1.1 “The National Policy Context”), referencing The Local Government Act 1973 and General Disposal Consent (England) 2003. Our internal process for a CAT is set out in Section 3.0 “The Application Process”. We believe that these sections already provide sufficient detail.

Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

4. That the Cabinet reviews the operation of the Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group with a view to increasing the resourcing to support it, broadening the membership to include Finance, Legal and Public Health colleagues, and making the regularity of its meetings more flexible.	Accepted	We have added in Public Health to the Terms of Reference as a member of the Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group. This member will be an appropriate officer as nominated by the Director of Public Health. Finance and Legal colleagues will naturally already be involved in the process of carrying out a CAT or Community Lease.
5. That the Cabinet ensures the property team works with relevant other Council departments to develop common definitions of 'social value' across teams	Accepted	We will contribute to any Council work around developing a common definition of 'social value', and will feed back any lessons we learn from the CAT / Community Leasing process.
6. That the Cabinet provides clarification over its social value priorities, to enable proactive place-shaping with regards to land and assets	Accepted	We will incorporate any clarification we are given regarding social value priorities and update our assessment criteria to reflect them accordingly.
7. That the Cabinet ensures the property team are aware of and, as far as possible, in alignment with approaches taken by Oxfordshire's district and city councils with a view to avoiding creating inconsistencies following the upcoming unitarisation(s) under Local Government Reorganisation	Partially Accepted	The Community Asset Transfer and Community Leasing Working Group will be informed of the district and city approaches, although the approach taken will differ at times in reflection of OCC's differing property and asset portfolio.
8. That the Cabinet ensures that there is a consistency of approach towards leases and transfers granted under the proposed	Accepted	The CAT and Community Leases are designed to create a consistent approach to all community tenants. We have written the current "rent holiday" tenants to work with them over the next year,

policy and existing leases when they come up for renewal		and we will continue the same, equal approach to all leases when they come up for renewal.

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 SEPTEMBER 2026

DEVOLUTION UPDATE

Report by Kim Sawyer

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**

   a) note the changed national policy context for devolution, including the Government's stated preference for mayoral strategic authorities and its ambition for every area in England to be covered by a strategic authority by the end of 2028;

   b) note that Leaders across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley remain supportive of devolution in principle but have not yet reached consensus on the Government's current offer, with continuing concerns relating to geography, powers, funding, deliverability and alignment with strategic service boundaries

   c) note the interdependencies between Devolution, Local Government Reorganisation and the future organisation of strategic services across the Thames Valley;

   d) support continued officer engagement with Government departments and Thames Valley partners to develop a robust, evidence-based proposition for future devolution arrangements in England.

Executive Summary

2. This report provides an update on the current national and local position on Devolution across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley. The national context has changed significantly following the appointment of the new Prime Minister. Notably the preference for Mayoral Strategic Authorities with an ambition to give every area in England a strategic authority by the end of 2028.

3. The report also summarises the Government's letter to Leaders of 06 August 2026, which requested a clear local position on whether areas wished to pursue mayoral or non-mayoral strategic authority.

4. Across the Thames Valley, Leaders remain supportive of mayoral devolution in principle but have not yet reached consensus on the Government's current

offer. Key issues include the proposed geography, the relationship with Local Government Reorganisation, the need to protect strategic service coherence, and the level of certainty available on powers, funding and implementation.

National Policy Context

5. The Government's approach to English devolution has entered a period of transition. The emerging policy direction set out in the Rewiring the State - Cabinet Statement, released on 31 July 2026, outlines a major shift of power, resources, and fiscal control from Whitehall to local leaders and mayors across England. It builds upon the foundational English Devolution White Paper, initially introduced to expand and standardise the mayoral combined authority model. Core principals for this are set out below: -

   1) **Fiscal Control** - Mayors will retain a share of local business rates starting in April 2027, move toward retained income tax from April 2028, and secure the power to introduce an Overnight Visitor Levy.

   2) **Universal Coverage** - Aims to establish a comprehensive map of Strategic Authorities (renamed from Combined Authorities) covering all of England.

   3) **New Mayors** - New mayoral strategic authorities and elections are scheduled for Cumbria, Cheshire, and Warrington, with a subsequent wave in spring 2028.

   4) **Integrated Settlements** - Expanding single, flexible funding pots (previously limited to trailblazers like Greater Manchester and the West Midlands) to more metro regions to cut down on micromanagement from central government.

6. A dedicated fiscal devolution roadmap and comprehensive white paper detailing full legislative timetables and statutory frameworks are slated for publication in Autumn 2026.

Letter to Leaders, 06 August 2026

7. Following the Cabinet Statement, the Government issued a letter dated 06 August 2026 to Leaders of local authorities that do not currently form part of a strategic authority. The letter reaffirmed the Government's commitment to move power out of Westminster to local and strategic authorities. It linked devolution to wider reform of local government, including the establishment of strong unitary authorities through Local Government Reorganisation, reform to support the financial sustainability of councils, potential changes to the local retention of business rates, and reform of high-cost services including adult and children's social care, homelessness, and special educational needs and disabilities.

8. The letter confirmed that the Government wants every area in England to have a strategic authority and its strong preference for a mayoral model. For areas

where discussions were already underway, the Government sought a clear statement of the local position, including whether the preferred model was mayoral or non-mayoral, by the end of August, with announcements on the next wave of strategic authorities expected from September.

9. Oxfordshire County Council have provided a joint response to this letter confirming their support for a mayoral strategic authority across the Thames Valley and asked for a meeting with the relevant Minister to discuss the concerns outlined in this report.

Current Position Across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley

10. Leaders across Oxfordshire and the Thames Valley remain supportive of the principle of devolution and recognise the potential benefits of greater local influence over strategic investment, infrastructure, transport, skills, housing and economic growth.

11. Geography remains the most significant issue. While recognising the importance of scale, Leaders have previously raised concerns that a geography that does not align with existing strategic institutions and key public service boundaries could weaken rather than strengthen strategic delivery.

12. Without this alignment, Leaders, Mayors and Chief Executives would need to work across multiple Police and Crime Commissioner boundaries, Fire and Rescue Authorities and Integrated Care Systems. This would create unnecessary pressure and bureaucracy for a newly established authority, limit its ability to deliver effective public service reform at scale, and introduce operational complexity that is unlikely to be manageable in practice.

13. Leaders are committed to continue to work with Government to secure an ambitious devolution settlement for the Thames Valley, one that reflects the scale of our contribution to the national economy and gives local people real power over the decisions that matter most.

Impact of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

14. LGR is a major dependency for devolution across Oxfordshire. The proposed creation of new unitary councils from April 2028 will change democratic mandates, local authority boundaries, service responsibilities and delivery capacity. Future devolution arrangements must therefore be designed to work with, rather than cut across, the emerging unitary structures.

15. There is a risk that devolution and LGR proceed on different geographies or timetables, leading to fragmentation of strategic services. Care will be needed to avoid the disaggregation of strategic services where scale, footprint and partnership alignment are critical to effective delivery.

16. On 07 September 2026 Angela Rayner MP Secretary of State for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (MHCLG) made a statement to the House of Commons on LGR announcing that there would be a review of the LGR decision for Oxfordshire. Services will continue to work with the LGR programme to protect strategic capacity, where possible, across Oxfordshire.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

17. Devolution has the potential to support the Council's corporate priorities by strengthening strategic planning, enabling place-based investment and improving the alignment of services around residents, communities and businesses. A future Thames Valley proposition should support sustainable growth, inclusive economic opportunity, infrastructure delivery, climate resilience and improved outcomes across Oxfordshire.

Financial Implications

18. This report does not seek approval for new expenditure. Existing officer time continues to be used to support engagement with Government, local authority partners and programme planning. Further financial implications would arise if Government invited the area to submit a formal proposal or if local partners agreed to establish new programme arrangements. Any future decision would require detailed financial appraisal, including transition costs, programme resourcing, potential funding opportunities and long-term governance costs.

Legal Implications

19. There are no immediate legal implications arising from this update report. Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation are subject to national legislation, statutory guidance and formal decision-making processes. Any future proposal for a strategic authority, mayoral governance model or local consent process would require detailed legal advice on powers, statutory tests, governance, consultation, democratic accountability and implementation.

Staff Implications

20. There are no immediate staffing implications arising from this report. Continued engagement on devolution will require officer capacity across policy, governance, finance, legal, communications, service planning and programme management. If the programme moves into a formal proposal or implementation phase, further staffing and programme resourcing requirements will need to be identified and brought forward through the appropriate decision-making route.

Equality and Inclusion Implications

21. This report provides an update and does not make decisions that directly affect residents or service users. Equality and inclusion considerations will need to be embedded in any future devolution proposal, particularly in relation to access to services, rural and urban needs, economic inclusion, transport connectivity, skills, housing and democratic participation. An Equality Impact Assessment should be undertaken if a formal proposal is developed.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

22. Local Government Reorganisation is central to the future devolution position. The proposed creation of new unitary councils from April 2028 will affect governance, service delivery, financial planning and democratic accountability. Any future strategic authority proposal will need to align with the emerging unitary landscape and avoid creating fragmented responsibilities or duplicated governance across strategic services.

Sustainability Implications

23. There are no direct sustainability implications arising from this update report. Devolution could, however, provide opportunities to strengthen strategic action on climate, transport, infrastructure, spatial planning, energy and nature recovery if future powers and funding are aligned with local priorities. Any future formal proposal should assess climate and ecological impacts and identify opportunities to support the Council's climate commitments.

Risk Management

24. The main risks are policy uncertainty, loss of momentum, misalignment between devolution and Local Government Reorganisation, insufficient consensus across the Thames Valley, and the potential fragmentation of strategic services if future geographies are not coherent. These risks are being managed through continued engagement with Government, joint working with partner authorities, evidence gathering on geography and functional alignment, and preparation of a clearer proposition should Government invite further local submissions.

Consultations

25. No public consultation has been undertaken specifically for this update report. Engagement has continued with Leaders and senior officers across the Thames Valley and with Government officials. Formal consultation requirements would need to be considered if Government invited a statutory proposal, mayoral governance arrangement or other formal devolution process.

Kim Sawyer
Devolution Director

Contact Officer: Rose Sutton, Programme Manager, Devolution

07 September 2026

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 September 2026

Integrated Social Value at OCC

Report by Ian Dyson, Director of Financial and Commercial Services

RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to**

   a) Note the range of socially valuable activity undertaken across the council and recent efforts to bring a coordinated approach that integrates relevant initiatives to maximise impact.
   b) Endorse the council continuing to champion county-wide community impact until LGR vesting day, acknowledging that as the new Unitary Authorities are established that competing priorities may seek to localise initiatives.

Executive Summary

2. In response to requests from members, this paper articulates a landscape of 'socially valuable' activity beyond the impact of the council's statutory obligations. The paper provides an overview of a range of initiatives, how they contribute to the council's strategic priorities, and addresses key risks to the ongoing delivery of this portfolio of activities.

Background

3. The council provides a wide range of services directly to residents. These services support their health and wellbeing, provide infrastructure that connects communities, manage their waste and protects the natural environment. Each of these services delivers social value to the residents and communities in Oxfordshire.

4. This paper differentiates between the council's core services and focuses on how the council's discretionary efforts on 'socially valuable' activities deliver beyond our statutory responsibilities.

5. Previous submissions to members have taken a project-by-project approach or have fallen within officer delegated decisions. Annex 1 to this paper collates a variety of active initiatives from across the council and articulates how the respective schemes are contributing (or are planned to contribute) to the council's priorities.

6. The initiatives have been developed in response to different drivers which include:

   (a) Legal obligations (e.g. to evaluate social value commitments in tenders)
   (b) Addressing market failures (e.g. the community funds)
   (c) Exploring new operating models for the council (e.g. community hubs)
   (d) Leading by example as a responsible organisation operating in the county (e.g. Net Zero strategy)

Integrated Working

7. In developing socially valuable initiatives, the council works closely with a range of partners that represent communities of residents and / or businesses. These partners help to shape the initiatives to enable more impactful outcomes. Below is a sample of the collaborations undertaken.

   (a) The council has developed a successful relationship with Oxford University Development and are actively collaborating to bring key pillars of the OxRail strategy to fruition. This includes work to explore a new railway station in Begbroke and a lynchpin for regeneration and development in the area, bringing new housing and employment opportunities to local communities.
   (b) MGroup are one of the council's most important suppliers, holding the largest operational contract (highways maintenance) and delivering additional capital schemes as well. Due to changes in central government funding priorities, a major pillar of their social value delivery was put at risk – a scheme that supported armed forces veterans into highways employment. We connected MGroup with Enterprise Oxfordshire to explore opportunities to link skills funding to support the veterans to transition to new careers.
   (c) In March, the council supported the Local B-corp Oxfordshire awards ceremony, building connections with a community of local businesses that are mission driven and understanding more of the barriers they face to success. This connection has helped to shape the council's approach to social value through procurement
   (d) The council regularly shares updates and best practice with other county and unitary authorities, and with the five district councils within Oxfordshire. While the council determined that the "Match My Project" scheme championed by Oxford City Council was not appropriate for our needs (due to the hyper local, Oxford-centric projects and the high level of administrative effort), we continued to offer advice and feedback to support the development of the scheme.
   (e) The council regularly collaborates with business representative groups including the Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) and the Oxfordshire Social Enterprise Partnership (OSEP). Through these collaborations, the council is able to shape policy that supports the member organisations and reduce barriers to entry for its own supply

chains. Feedback from these groups were instrumental in shaping the council's refreshed social value policy approved by Cabinet in March 2026.

(f) The council funded a 12-month pilot into a new care-cooperative approach for adult social care. This collaboration involved African Families in the UK, Community Catalysts, Co-operative Futures, Oxford Community Action, Oxford Brookes University, and Owned by Oxford. The decision was taken by the council to not continue the funding as the model would only work at scale, however it demonstrated the power of collaboration and the role of the council in facilitating a range of organisations and providing seed funding for new initiatives.

Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)

8. With the recent minded to decision, LGR creates new complexities for OCC's delivery of socially valuable activity. Over the coming months, joint committees will be established to coordinate activities across the existing authorities. Next May will see elections of councillors to the new authorities, shortly after which new constitutions will need to be established. While OCC has an enduring responsibility to ensure value is delivered for residents in the long-term, vesting day of 1st April 2028 sets a timeframe beyond which OCC cannot unduly obligate the new authorities. Together, these pressures necessarily place a constraint on the level of ambition and duration of socially valuable initiatives.

9. Over the coming months until vesting day, OCC will continue to champion initiatives that have a meaningful positive impact for residents and communities county-wide. The aim is to play a leading role in shaping the social value approaches for the new authorities, collaborating with peers in existing authorities to propose ambitious contributions to the new constitutions and policies.

Corporate Policies and Priorities

10. Delivery of socially valuable activity directly contributes towards OCC's "Fairer" strategic objective. Most, if not all, of the initiatives aim to create new opportunities for under-represented individuals, support growth in Oxfordshire-based VCSEs and SMEs, and support delivery of OCC's responsibilities to the most vulnerable in our communities.

Financial Implications

The financial implications section should be completed by a member of the finance service

11. No programme-level resources are allocated to ensure coordination of social value linked initiatives across OCC, except for circa 0.5 FTE within Commercial and Procurement. Responsibility sits within BAU officer roles to ensure

individual projects are resourced appropriately (including any requests for funding) and are coordinated with other initiatives across the council.

Comments checked by:
Drew Hodgson
Strategic Finance Business Partner
drew.hodgson@oxfordshire.gov.uk

Legal Implications

The legal implications section should be completed by a member of the legal service

12. There are no direct legal implications of this report as it covers an overview of individual initiatives linked to delivering "socially valuable" outcomes. Legal implications will be considered on a project-by-project basis with advice given that relate to the specific issues of each initiative.

Comments checked by: Jayne Pringle, Principal Solicitor- Contracts

Staff Implications

13. The report does not recommend the deployment of any additional staff or other resources. Socially valuable activity continues to be delivered by BAU resources across OCC, now with greater coordination to avoid duplication, overlap, or confusion with target communities.

Equality & Inclusion Implications

14. This report does not present any direct equality & inclusion impacts. Socially valuable activities underway across OCC directly or indirectly contribute to a fairer Oxfordshire for residents. Any necessary EIA will be completed on a project-by-project basis to ensure an appropriate level of detail is available.

Local Government Reorganisation Implications

15. Each authority involved in the Oxfordshire / West Berkshire LGR programme have different definitions and priorities for social impact. These are largely defined by the different geographic and service-linked responsibilities of each authority. Each socially valuable initiative underway through OCC will form part of the respective services' disaggregation workstream with the overarching policy for social value to be part of the Procurement & Contracts workstream.

16. The new Unitary Authorities will need to establish their own policies for social value based on appetite, resources, and new local priorities. The Procurement & Contracts workstream will provide options to the new authorities based on

current experience of what is working well, where the need lies, and how the current authorities see the opportunities.

Sustainability Implications

17. This report does not present any direct sustainability impacts. Socially valuable activities underway across OCC directly or indirectly contribute to a greener environment for Oxfordshire residents. Any necessary SIA will be completed on a project-by-project basis to ensure an appropriate level of detail is available.

Risk Management

18. There are a small number of strategic risks related to OCC's socially valuable activities. These are captured below with short descriptions and mitigations / management actions.

Risk	Risk Level	Mitigation / Management Action
Financial *Investment in socially valuable activity beyond core statutory services creates additional budget pressures*	L	Commercial oversight and coordination with Finance to ensure spend on socially valuable activities is connected to delivery of OCC's mission and statutory responsibilities.
Reputational *Delivery of socially valuable activity is seen as the "wrong" initiative or is a distraction from projects the council "should" be spending time on*	M	Each initiative to have clear link back to legal obligations and / or delivery of OCC's mission and statutory responsibilities. Any contentious initiatives to have proactive comms to support landing the "why" message with relevant stakeholders.
Compliance *A lack of understanding internally leads to non-compliance with both OCC Social Value Policy and / or legal obligations under the Procurement Act 2023*	M	Social Value to form part of the Commercial Curriculum ensuring training and support is available for internal colleagues. Additional guidance material and structured templates provided to ensure compliance by design.
Political *The new Government extend the amended central government social value policy to local government authorities, restricting social value to considering only job creation and growth.*	M	Work with peers from other authorities and the LGA to champion the current broader definition of social value which better aligns to the broad responsibilities of local government authorities. Maximise the impact of our new social value policy in the short to medium term.
LGR *The 3UA model creates barriers to key initiatives that would have been based on county-wide strengths as*	H	Utilise the system-wide Procurement & Contracts workstream to share current practice, policy, and social value principles to seek early alignment around shared best practice.

they do not align to the new authority boundaries. Different approaches and priorities between existing authorities and new authorities creates barriers to delivery in the 12-months before vesting day.		Ensure socially valuable activity is factored into Vertical workstreams and considered in disaggregation planning.

Consultations

19. N/A

Ian Dyson, Director of Financial & Commercial Services

Annex: Annex 1 – Overview of socially valuable activity across OCC

Background papers: OCC Published Social Value Policy: Social Value Policy | Oxfordshire County Council

Contact Officer: Richard Scarlett, Head of Commercial & Procurement

September 2026

Annex 1 – Overview of socially valuable activity across OCC

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
Social Value in Procurement	**Social Value Policy** *The implementation of the recently approved social value policy, setting clear priorities and expectations for suppliers to contribute to OCC's strategic mission.*					
	Commercial Strategy *The overarching strategy driving OCC to achieve greater value from all external engagements, covering financial, social, and operational sources of value.*					
	Commercial Continuous Improvement *The ongoing improvement in the efficacy of the commercial function through better training, guidance, and templates.*					
	Payment Terms *Differentiating payment terms for SMEs and VCSEs to support cashflow and encourage economic growth.*					
	Social Value Prospectus *A curated resource for out-of-county suppliers to select opportunities from to deliver social value back to Oxfordshire*					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
	residents if they are unable to deliver any material impact from their own initiatives.					
Community Investment	**Councillor Priority Fund** *£10,000 budget per Councillor to support projects in their division until end of FY2027-28.*					
	Community Capacity Fund *Supporting small community groups with grant funding to support Oxfordshire residents to live well in their communities, remaining independent and health for as long as possible.*					
	Connected Communities Fund *Funding to support community groups with initiatives to reduce isolation and increase connection.*					
Community Assets	**Community Asset Transfer Policy** *Enabling the transfer of under-utilised council assets to community groups on preferential terms on the basis that the asset is used for community good.*					
	Community Asset Leasing Policy *Improving the utilisation and impact of council assets through preferential leasing arrangements to community groups on the basis that the asset is used for community good.*					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
Community Delivery	**Community Action Group (CAG) Oxfordshire** *A model of centre-led community groups working to make communities more sustainable places to live.*					
	Community Catalysts *Establishing micro-level community care organisations.*					
	External Research Endorsement *Utilising OCC's brand to endorse relevant third-party research proposals so that external funding is allocated to projects that align with OCC's mission.*					
	Best Start Family Hubs *Coordinated service delivery to help new families from pregnancy through early years and beyond.*					
	Community Hubs *Coordinated service delivery to help local communities access services earlier and more conveniently helping to prevent more complex demand.*					
Responsible Operations	**Net Zero Strategy** *Targeting Net Zero council operations by 2030 to contribute to tackling the climate crisis while also delivering benefits to OCC.*					
	Operational Waste Reuse & Recycling					

Category	Initiative	Primary Thematic Impacts				
		Greener	Fairer	Healthier	Economic Growth	Efficacy of OCC
	Minimising the environmental impact of OCC's own operation.					
	Care-leaver Support *Recognising the unique responsibilities that OCC has to children we care for and supporting their transition to independent living.*					
	Local Area Investment Plans *Developing coordinated plans that attract OCC and third-party investment into communities.*					

PERFORMANCE AND CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

18 September 2026

AI Benefits

Report by Kit Collingwood - Director of Technology and Customer Experience

1. **RECOMMENDATION**

The Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee is RECOMMENDED to

- Consider the report and **AGREE** any recommendations it wishes to make to Cabinet therefrom.

Executive Summary

2. Oxfordshire County Council began its planned work on artificial intelligence in 2024. It started with a pilot of 500 Microsoft 365 Copilot users from different parts of the council. The pilot tested whether Copilot could help staff save time, improve work quality, work safely and support better services.

3. After the pilot, the council bought 4,500 Copilot licences for a wider rollout from 1 April 2025. The council also put stronger security controls in place, provided training, created a champions network, and set up a Teams community to help staff learn from each other. Around four out of five licensed users have used Copilot within the monthly usage measure.

4. The council also uses specialist AI tools. Beam, previously called Magic Notes, helps social care staff by creating draft notes from conversations. Zoom AI helps residents reach information and services through digital and phone contact. AI is also included in other systems used by the council, such as Sasha, Oak and Monday.com.

5. The council has made strong progress in giving staff access to AI and helping them use it. The next stage is to focus on clear service benefits, better measurement, safe use, and making sure AI is used where it adds real value be that financial, process or people.

The journey so far

6. Oxfordshire County Council started its AI work in a planned way. The first step was a pilot with 500 Microsoft 365 Copilot users. The pilot helped the

council test how AI could support staff, protect information, and improve services before making it available more widely.

Why did the council invest in AI?

7. The business case was about making services better and helping staff work more efficiently, to deliver tangible savings. The council wanted to test whether AI could give staff more time, improve the quality of work, reduce repeated manual tasks, and provide a safe alternative to public AI tools. Potential benefits included:

- better reports, recommendations and everyday messages;
- less time spent on repeated manual tasks;
- fewer errors in routine work;
- better support for staff, including learning and working together;
- better services for residents;
- safer and more controlled use of AI; and
- a stronger position as a responsible user of AI in local government.

8. The council expected AI to release staff time, improve work quality, support better services, and reduce the risk of staff using unsafe public AI tools. Some benefits will save time or improve the experience of staff and residents. Some may reduce costs, but this must be proven before it is treated as a cash saving.

9. The introduction of Copilot was also to help support the Service Redesign programme and to give managers the tools to automate manual tasks and design services in different ways.

How has AI been adopted?

Volume of use

10. The council bought 4,500 Copilot licences. Usage has stayed at about four out of five licensed users. This shows wide use across the council. However, the current measure only shows whether someone has used Copilot in a 30-day period. It does not show how often they use it, how well they use it, or how much value it creates.

How AI is being used

11. Individual productivity: Staff use AI to help with meeting notes, email volumes, drafting documents, improving reports, preparing presentations and organising work.

12. Team and process support: The council is exploring AI agents and automation to help teams with repeated tasks and shared processes.

13. Social care practice: Beam creates first draft notes from conversations. Social care staff then review and correct the record before it is used.

14. Resident contact: Zoom AI helps residents find information and services more quickly through digital and phone contact. It is intended to keep human support available where it is most needed.

15. Knowledge and self-service: AI features in council systems can help staff find useful information and support simple self-service tasks.

How is usage monitored?

16. The council monitors Copilot use through Microsoft reporting and a Power BI dashboard. The information is reviewed on a regular basis by the programme board and delivery team.

17. For Zoom AI the measure is based on how many calls are resolved using the AI agent and how many calls are then passed to a human agent. The customer contact centre measures these KPIs. As new functionality is added the impact is measured.

18. For Beam Magic Notes the services measure the value it brings.

19. As the Copilot moves from project to BAU the usage stats will be reviewed by the IT department. Lack of use will be investigated by the Digital Academy and appropriate action taken, from training to removal.

What the monitoring shows

20. The monitoring shows that Copilot has reached many staff. It does not yet prove that AI is used deeply in every role or that it has delivered all expected financial benefits.

21. Zoom AI measures show that fewer calls are being passed to human agents. Since an AI voice agent was introduced in March of this year inbound calls passed to a human have dropped by 50% on average. The web chatbot agent used on the congestion pages so far has had 10.8k people use it, with 96% of them not asking to be transferred to a human agent.

22. For Beam Magic Notes the monitoring shows high usage across various forms, meaning social workers are using the tool for a range of purposes. Reviews of reports also shows that the quality of reporting has got better, and that it has greatly helped social workers who are neurodiverse or dyslexic.

23. The council will continue to measure use. We also plan to begin to measure outcomes, service improvements and savings where possible.

Progress against the business case

24. The council has made good progress against the first part of the business case by giving many staff access to AI and supporting them to use it safely. The next step is to show more clearly where AI is improving services, saving time, or reducing cost.

Further adoption and deployment

25. The council will continue to develop AI in a careful and targeted way, assessing new tools and additions to existing systems and ensuring they are safe, ethical and sustainable.

26. For Copilot the next phase will focus on the roles, teams and services where AI and automation can make the biggest difference. A product team in IT will take on the responsibility for delivering the value across the council.

27. The next phase will focus on:
   - supporting groups of staff who have similar needs;
   - improving processes before adding AI to them;
   - using AI agents and automation for repeated tasks that have a high impact;
   - checking whether licences are being used by the right people;
   - measuring service improvements, time saved and financial impact;

How the council is and will continue to support effective use

28. As part of the IT Service redesign, we have created a Digital Academy and a Low Code Product Team. The combination of these teams will help support and deliver the following:

29. **Training:** The council has already provided learning sessions for staff on Co Pilot, and further learning pathways will be developed by the Digital Academy.

30. **Champions and community:** Around 150 ambassadors for Co Pilot received extra support as part of Co Pilot rollout. The Copilot Hangar Teams community, newsletters and intranet pages helped staff share examples and learn from each other. As part of future phases of work, the Digital Academy will review our current champion model.

31. **Delivery capability:** The Low-Code product team will receive training to help design and build AI agents. These agents can support repeatable tasks and help teams work more efficiently.

32. **Secure information foundations:** The council is moving information from shared drives to SharePoint. This supports better control of access, security classification, retention and information sharing.

33. **Targeted adoption:** Future work will focus on the roles, repeated tasks and services where AI can show clear value.

34. **Safe use:** The council uses policy, guidance and controls to support safe AI use. Staff must continue to check AI outputs and remain responsible for decisions. Procurement rules have also been added around AI to check for ethical AI and to remove undesired bias.

Risks and controls

35. AI brings risks as well as benefits. These include wrong or incomplete answers, poor use of personal information, unfair results, over-reliance on AI, unclear accountability, cost growth and environmental impact. The council reduces these risks through security controls, staff training, clear guidance, human review, monitoring and careful choice of where AI is used.

Monitoring for the next phase

36. We hope that future monitoring will be able to show whether AI is being used well, whether staff have the right skills, whether services are improving, and whether savings are real. For Copilot this will be done by the Low-Code Product team. For service base AI such as Zoom and Beam Magic Notes the service will monitor the usage.

Reflections on Adoption so Far

37. As part of the pilot, we did see some significant time savings in certain roles and types of work. Note taking, meeting minutes, research and large data analytics. However, ROI will only come when the workforce is reduced in size. The individual benefit has been far greater than the financial benefit.

38. More time should have been spent on training Senior Managers on the art of the possible and how to think differently about service design, so that we could capitalise on good ideas and areas to save money

Conclusion

39. The council has moved from a small pilot to wide use of AI across the organisation. It uses Copilot for general office work, Beam Magic Notes in social care, Zoom AI in customer contact, and AI features in other systems. This gives the council a strong base for future improvement.

40. Giving access to such a powerful assistant to every officer for less than £250 per year could be considered value for money, but translating that saving is proving more difficult to prove and realise.

41. The work we continue to do increase the use of AI in a safe and responsible way needs to be the future of how we work across the council. The next level is to re-imagine how the council works in the long term.

Financial Implications

42. The report identifies that AI has the potential to release staff time, improve productivity and support service improvement. However, cashable savings have not yet been fully evidenced, and future action will be required to support a clear delivery plan.

43. To deliver full financial return, future monitoring should be enhanced to develop a comprehensive understand of assess licence use, to ensure value for money, capacity released, service outcomes and any financial benefits that can be delivered.

Legal Implications

44. The report identifies the need for AI to be used safely and responsibly, with appropriate information governance, data protection controls, security controls and human oversight. Existing AI policy, guidance and restrictions on the use of third-party AI tools provide controls to support responsible use.

45. Any further deployment of AI should continue to be assessed against relevant legal, data protection and information governance requirements

Name: Kit Collingwood, Director of Technology and Customer Experience

Annex: Nil.

Background papers: Nil.

Other Documents: None

Contact Officer: Alastair Read, Head of IT Services

September 2026

By virtue of paragraph(s) 7 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A
of the Local Government Act 1972.

Agenda Item 10

Document is Restricted

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