



PLACE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Wednesday, 24 June 2026 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 11.30 am.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Liam Walker - in the Chair
Councillor Bethia Thomas (Deputy Chair)
Councillor Thomas Ashby
Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor Judy Roberts
Councillor Emily Kerr
Councillor Lesley McLean
Councillor Susanna Pressel
Councillor Leigh Rawlins

**Other Members in
Attendance:**

Councillor Gareth Epps, Cabinet member for Transport
Councillor Neil Fawcett, Deputy Leader of the Council and
Cabinet member for Resources

Officers:

Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways
Ashley Hayden, Team Leader (Area Travel Plans)
Katharine Broomfield, Integrated Transport Programme
Lead
Susannah Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy,
and Partnerships
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer (whole meeting)

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.

25/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Brant (substitute: Cllr Roberts).

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

There were none.

27/26 MINUTES (Agenda No. 3)

Subject to attaching “and expressed concern about the resourcing of the Environment Agency which often led to untimely engagement.” to the sixth paragraph

of 17/26 Minerals and Waste Planning, the minutes of the meeting on 22 April 2026 and of 12 May 2026 were **AGREED** as true and accurate records.

28/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESSES

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

29/26 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

(Agenda No. 5)

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

30/26 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet response to the report on Repair of Defects and Super-users.

The Committee was advised that the outstanding response to its recommendations on Road Safety was being progressed.

31/26 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN

(Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **AGREED** to an additional meeting on 21 October 2026 and to the proposed work programme, adding an item on Highways Preparedness for Winter to the October meeting and one on a review of changes at Household Waste and Recycling Centres to the November one.

32/26 OXBUS 2040: PLAN FOR BUS AND ENHANCED PARTNERSHIP PLUS

(Agenda No. 8)

The Committee had requested a report on OxBus 20240: Plan for Bus and Enhanced Partnership Plus.

Councillor Gareth Epps, Cabinet member for Transport, attended to present the report accompanied by Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, Ashley Hayden, Team Leader (Area Travel Plans), and Katharine Broomfield, Integrated Transport Programme Lead.

Cllr Epps introduced the report, setting out the emerging OxBUS 2040 Plan as a high-level strategic framework establishing the long-term direction for bus services in Oxfordshire, supported by the Enhanced Partnership Plus (EP+) as the principal delivery mechanism.

The Cabinet member explained that the Plan was being brought forward at an early stage to enable scrutiny input and influence prior to public consultation, and that it would operate as a strategic “vision and outcomes” document aligned with the Local Transport and Connectivity Plan.

The Cabinet Member highlighted three core priorities, namely: improving journey reliability and safety with a network that works for both rural and urban communities; seamless, integrated travel; a cleaner, greener bus network. He emphasised that the Plan did not propose specific service changes but rather set a framework for delivery through EP+ and that he welcomed the opportunity to understand members' priorities. The Cabinet member acknowledged that Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and Devolution meant that change was inevitable but that the current Plan needed to set out the vision and outcomes regardless of future changes.

In discussion, Members broadly welcomed the ambition of the Plan but raised a range of substantive issues relating to delivery, funding, and network design. A significant portion of the discussion focused on rural connectivity and the tension between aspiration and resource availability. Members emphasised that many rural routes were not commercially viable but were essential to residents as "lifeline services" enabling access to employment, healthcare, and education.

The Committee asked how the proposed identification of "socially necessary services" would translate into sustainable delivery. Officers explained that the first step would be to define and publish a list of such services, supported by a comprehensive network review, and that delivery could involve a mix of traditional operators, community transport and voluntary provision. They advised that funding was likely to depend on grants, developer contributions and existing budgets, and acknowledged that the financial context remained challenging. Members also explored the legal implications of the designation, noting officers' advice that it would require a robust mitigation process before adverse changes were made, but would not itself secure funding or prevent service withdrawals.

The Committee then considered the EP+ arrangements and the extent to which these would strengthen the Council's ability to shape the bus network. Officers advised that the effect would depend on how commitments were drafted, but that EP+ could include legally binding obligations, provide greater influence over network design, introduce open-book accounting and require operators to demonstrate that mitigation had been exhausted before service changes were made. Members recognised the potential benefits of these arrangements but stressed the need for a comprehensive financial and risk assessment, particularly where operators might seek to withdraw from unprofitable services.

Members also examined the relationship between bus provision and new developments. Concerns were raised about some areas where bus services had been introduced too late to influence travel behaviour, resulting in car-dependent communities. Officers pointed to the role of Movement and Place Plans and Section 106 agreements in securing earlier provision. However, they noted the practical difficulty of balancing early intervention, when demand is low, with the need to ensure services are sustainable.

The Committee considered passenger experience, including the provision of real-time passenger information. Members noted that a high proportion of bus stops lacked such facilities and that this had particular implications in rural areas and for those without access to digital tools. Officers advised that investment would need to be

targeted, taking account of both capital and ongoing revenue costs, and that priority would be given to locations where the greatest benefit could be achieved, including areas with poor mobile connectivity. Members suggested that further evidence should be gathered on the impact of real-time information on user confidence and patronage.

Members revisited the potential role of rural feeder or shuttle services linking smaller settlements to main bus corridors, which had been recommended by the Committee in its report to Cabinet arising from the Bus Services and Rural Transport (including Mobility Hubs) report in April 2026. Officers acknowledged that such services could support wider network performance but noted challenges relating to reliability, connection timing, and financial viability. Members suggested that these services should be considered as part of a whole-network approach rather than being assessed in isolation, noting that feeder services could increase usage on main routes.

The Committee also suggested that it would be valuable for the strategy to include a section contextualising the rebuilding of the network and that it should be explained that, whilst particularly acute in rural areas, the bus network needs to develop step by step. It also observed that some minor formatting changes would make the document slightly easier to read and that there should be more emphasis on the need for bus growth. The Committee also asked if it would be appropriate for contractual obligations to be qualified so that the Council excluded things which were beyond its control.

The Cabinet Member agreed that additional historical context would strengthen the strategy, noting the impact of COVID, contract procurement difficulties, fluctuating passenger numbers and rising fuel costs, particularly in rural areas. He acknowledged that EP+ arrangements limited local flexibility and that these constraints should be explained more clearly during consultation. Whilst recognising the potential benefits of rural shuttle services, he cautioned that their success depended on reliable connections and that any subsidy would need to be funded from limited resources. He concluded that the consultation process and the Committee's recommendations would help shape the final strategy and address these challenges.

The Committee commended the clarity and presentation of the draft consultation documents and praised the work of Oxford for Buses, amongst others, in progressing the development of the Plan. Members were also keen for the Council to highlight, both in the Plan and more widely, the experiences and examples of other authorities and how that had influenced the Council's thinking. Officers confirmed that such work had already been done and agreed it should be incorporated. It was also reported that that engagement activity, including stakeholder workshops and a citizens' assembly, would inform the next stages of development.

Cross-council boundary travel was also discussed with the Committee seeking to understand queried the Council's ability to influence services operated by out-of-county providers. Officers confirmed that coordination took place through regional partnership forums involving neighbouring authorities and operators, but that direct

control was limited in such cases. It was acknowledged that influence diminished at county boundaries and that collaborative working would be essential.

Members also explored how the Plan would integrate with wider transport strategies, including rail, mobility hubs, and active travel. Officers confirmed that the Plan was intentionally strategic and that detailed network design would be addressed through a separate network review process. They emphasised that integration across modes would be central to the Plan's development, with mobility hubs providing a key mechanism for linking services.

Potential caution was expressed by the Committee regarding the data underpinning the Plan, with Members noting the use of historic datasets in some cases. Officers advised that a range of evidence sources would be used, supplemented by local intelligence and updated through Movement and Place Plans, which were intended to be live documents subject to ongoing review.

The Committee emphasised the importance of an integrated network to rural communities and also highlighted the need to ensure that, once the Botley Road reopens, connecting services in Oxford should be improved. There was no desire to de-pedestrianise Carfax Street but there was an acceptance that this did make connecting services more challenging.

Members highlighted the difficulty of reaching the Oxford hospitals by public transport and the implications for service users. Officers acknowledged this issue as a significant gap and confirmed that engagement was underway with NHS partners as part of the Plan's development. Members also made broader observations regarding the need to draw on best practice from other authorities, the importance of aligning the Plan with mobility hub delivery and development planning, and the need to consider the role of services in supporting the visitor economy and night-time travel.

The Cabinet member supported developing mobility (or 'transport' hubs), noting that delivery was simpler where Section 106 funding was available but more challenging elsewhere. He agreed with the importance of improving public transport links to hospitals and confirmed that this remained a priority. Officers recognised the countywide challenges regarding coach parking and advised that coach parking associated with transport interchanges could be addressed through the bus strategy but that wider accessibility and parking issues were better considered through Movement and Place Plans. Officers also confirmed that officers were already engaging with local hospitals regarding transport connectivity.

The Chair noted the importance to residents of adequate coach parking and mentioned that Blenheim Palace has a shuttle service from Hanborough railway station which could be worth considering for other tourist sites. He closed by commending the Council's work on the report and on the Plan generally.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following observation to Cabinet:

1. That the Committee strongly endorses the idea of presenting to the Inclusive Transport and Movement Focus Group which the report says is being considered

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

1. That the Council's OxBUS 2040 consultation should place a strong emphasis on rural connectivity and protection of socially necessary services.
2. That the Council should ensure a comprehensive financial and risk assessment of Enhanced Partnership Plus is prepared and reported prior to its adoption.
3. That the Council should ensure that the Plan should strengthen alignment with planning and development, including the use of Section 106 contributions to secure early bus provision.
4. That the Council should give consideration to the role of rural feeder and shuttle services, including car clubs, as part of the wider network design.
5. That the Council should ensure that the Plan should incorporate learning from best practice elsewhere, including national and international examples.
6. That the Council should ensure that further work is undertaken to assess the benefits of real-time passenger information, particularly in rural areas.
7. That the Council should ensure that the framework for Enhanced Partnership Plus clearly sets out legal obligations, operator responsibilities, and associated risks.
8. That the Council should ensure that the Plan should articulate more clearly how it will deliver integration across modes, including rail and mobility hubs.
9. That the Council should include a section which contextualises the rebuilding of the bus network in the Plan.
10. That the Council should ensure, when the Plan is submitted to Cabinet, that Oxon for Buses's full submission is included.

33/26 FLAG-FLYING PROTOCOL (Agenda No. 9)

The Committee had requested a report on the Flag Flying Protocol before it was submitted for Cabinet approval.

The Deputy Leader of the Council and Cabinet member for Resources, Councillor Neil Fawcett, introduced the report and explained that its purpose was to set out clearly the Council's approach to flag flying. Susanna Wintersgill, Director of Public Affairs, Policy and Partnerships, advised that the Council had previously operated through custom and practice and that the proposed Protocol sought to formalise arrangements and preserve institutional knowledge.

During discussion, members proposed a number of amendments and points of clarification.

The Committee suggested that the Protocol should include provision for the Council flag to be flown at half-mast following the death of a serving or former councillor, particularly on the day of the funeral. The Cabinet Member indicated that he would be content for such an amendment to be incorporated.

Members also proposed several drafting changes. It was suggested that references to “Holocaust Day” should be amended to “Holocaust Memorial Day” and that the Chair of Council should be added to the group responsible for considering requests for discretionary flag flying. The Cabinet Member agreed that the latter proposal was appropriate, whilst noting the need to avoid creating an unduly cumbersome process.

The Committee noted a factual error in the report relating to the description of flags that could be flown without consent under planning legislation. It was observed that the report omitted reference to flags of international organisations of which the United Kingdom is a member and that this should be corrected. Members otherwise considered that the report provided an appropriate balance between flexibility and consistency.

Members questioned the inclusion within the Protocol of a provision for the flying of a white flag in certain circumstances. Officers explained that this had been suggested by Legal Services as a neutral means of recognising conflicts involving other countries without displaying the flag of a particular nation. Several members expressed concern that a white flag could be interpreted as a symbol of surrender and proposed that this provision be removed. The Cabinet Member indicated that he would welcome such a recommendation from the Committee.

The Committee **AGREED** to make the following observations to Cabinet:

1. That Holocaust Memorial Day should be consistently referred to as such rather than Holocaust Day;
2. That paragraph 4.8 of the Protocol should more correctly reference the Town and County Planning (Control of Advertisements) (England) Regulations 2007 (as amended).

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

1. That the Council should include reference to a flag flying at half-mast to commemorate the death of sitting and former councillors, including Honorary Aldermen;
2. That the Council should ensure that the Chair of Council is consulted by the Director of Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer in relation to civic flag flying.
3. That the Council should remove reference to flying a white flag from the Protocol.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing