



PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Thursday, 4 June 2026 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 1.18 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Ian Snowdon - in the Chair
Councillor Ron Batstone
Councillor Andrew Coles
Councillor Imade Edosomwan
Councillor Lee Evans
Councillor Jenny Hannaby
Councillor Georgina Heritage

Other Members in Attendance:

Cllr Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults

Officers:

Victoria Baran, Deputy Director of Adult Social Care
Isabel Rockingham, Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well,
Laura Price, CEO of Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action
Zoe Springs, CEO of Oxfordshire Community Foundation
Emily Lewis-Edwards, Joint CEO of Community First Oxfordshire
Sam Harper, Head of Service
Sally Ellis, Shared Lives Team Manager
Nikki Oleksiw, Shared Lives Social Worker
Jane Whitaker, Shared Lives Carer
Sarah Hopwood, Shared Lives Scheme “Expert by Experience”
Level Chingalembe, Head of Social Care Finance
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.

18/26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS

(Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Overton, substituted by Cllr Batstone, and Cllr Barlow.

19/26 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

(Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

20/26 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes of the meetings held on 19 March 2026, and 12 May 2026 were **AGREED** as a true and accurate record.

21/26 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

22/26 COMMUNITY CAPACITY GRANTS PROGRAMME

(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults, Victoria Baran, Deputy Director of Adult Social Care, and Isabel Rockingham, Head of Joint Commissioning – Age Well, were invited to present a report on the Community Capacity Grants Programme.

Laura Price, CEO of Oxfordshire Community & Voluntary Action, Zoe Springs, CEO of Oxfordshire Community Foundation, and, Emily Lewis-Edwards, Joint CEO of Community First Oxfordshire, were invited to support the Committee.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report by outlining the programme's role in supporting the Council's preventative agenda, helping residents to remain independent and connected within their communities. Officers explained that the programme had operated since 2022, funding voluntary and community organisations through the Connected Communities Fund and larger grants administered by established sector partners. More than 275 projects had been supported, reaching over 30,000 residents, with an annual value of around £900,000.

In discussion, Members first examined the delivery model and asked why funding was routed through intermediary organisations rather than awarded directly. Officers explained that partner bodies brought established local relationships, knowledge of community need, and the capacity to run accessible application processes, particularly for smaller organisations. Representatives of those partners added that they provided practical support to applicants, including help to shape bids and understand criteria, which had broadened participation and improved the quality of submissions.

Members then considered demand for the programme, noting that it was consistently oversubscribed. Officers confirmed that demand substantially exceeded available funding and that many unsuccessful applications were nevertheless strong. They explained that decisions were based on alignment with preventative outcomes, value for money, and reach into priority communities.

The Committee also asked whether the programme was reaching rural areas and underserved groups effectively. Officers said targeted engagement was undertaken to encourage applications from underrepresented areas and communities, and that the funding model allowed flexibility to respond to local circumstances. Members

nevertheless emphasised the need for continued monitoring to ensure equitable distribution.

Members explored how impact was measured and whether stronger evidence could be developed to demonstrate wider preventative benefits, including reduced demand on statutory services. Officers explained that monitoring currently combined quantitative data with qualitative evidence such as case studies and user feedback. They acknowledged that demonstrating longer-term preventative impact remained challenging, noting that more detailed evaluation would require additional resource and could place a disproportionate burden on smaller organisations. Officers also highlighted that many funded interventions were based on established evidence and confirmed that work was underway to strengthen evaluation arrangements in a proportionate manner.

Members welcomed the support available to smaller organisations, including one-to-one advice and feedback for unsuccessful applicants, but queried whether this created capacity pressures for delivery partners. Officers and partner representatives acknowledged that the approach was resource-intensive but said it was important to maintain accessibility and a diverse provider base.

The Committee also discussed the programme's sustainability in the context of wider financial pressures. Officers advised that future funding at current levels could not be guaranteed and would depend on budget decisions. Members raised concern that uncertainty could affect both the voluntary sector and the continuity of preventative support. Members also expressed interest in stronger links with funded organisations in their divisions to improve local visibility and accountability, which officers and partners welcomed.

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

- Further detailed reports containing qualitative and quantitative evidence be circulated to Members to support scrutiny of the programme's impact.
- Opportunities for Members to engage directly with funded organisations, including attendance at relevant forums, be explored.

The meeting adjourned at 11:00 and reconvened at 11:08.

23/26 UPDATE ON THE COUNCIL'S SHARED LIVES SERVICE (Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults, Sam Harper, Head of Service, Sally Ellis, Shared Lives Team manager, Nikki Oleksiw, Shared Lives Social Worker, Jane Whitaker, Shared Lives Carer, and Sarah Hopwood, Shared Lives Scheme "Expert by Experience", presented the update on the Council's Shared Lives Service.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report by outlining Shared Lives as a community-based model of care in which individuals are supported to live within family environments with approved carers, rather than in more traditional residential settings. Officers advised that the service currently supported over 100 individuals,

was regulated by the Care Quality Commission with a “Good” rating and delivered both improved personal outcomes and lower costs in many cases when compared with residential care. The presentation also highlighted the service’s role in supporting people with learning disabilities, mental health needs, and care leavers transitioning to adulthood, alongside ongoing work to expand capacity.

Members began by asking how consistently Shared Lives was considered through assessment and care planning. Officers said it formed part of standard care planning and was considered at an early stage where appropriate, but stressed that suitability depended on individual need, preference, compatibility with carers, and safeguarding considerations. Members asked whether earlier identification of suitable candidates could increase uptake, and officers agreed that further awareness among practitioners remained important.

The Committee then explored the scale of the service and the constraints on growth. Officers advised that recruitment of carers remained the principal constraint and that the approval process had to be robust to ensure quality and safety. This involved assessment, training, and careful matching, which could take several months. Members asked whether the Council had clear growth ambitions and whether progress was sufficient. Officers said there was a clear ambition to expand the service, but that growth had to be managed carefully to maintain quality and appropriate matches.

Members raised questions about recruitment and public awareness, noting that the model was not widely understood. Officers acknowledged this and said that successful recruitment was still often driven by word-of-mouth and informal networks. Members asked what more could be done to promote the scheme, including the role councillors might play locally. Officers welcomed Member support and said that clearer, more consistent messaging would help recruitment.

The Committee also discussed the uneven geographic distribution of carers across the county and the risk that people in some rural or less well-served areas might have more limited access to placements. Officers acknowledged this variation and advised that targeted recruitment activity was taking place in areas with lower provision, though this remained dependent on suitable individuals coming forward.

Members explored the financial and wider system benefits of the model, asking how Shared Lives compared with residential care. Officers confirmed, and was supported by the Expert by Experience, that placements were often significantly less expensive than residential care packages while also producing better personalised outcomes. They emphasised, however, that the service should not be seen solely as a cost-saving measure, as its main purpose was to provide a more suitable and independent form of support where appropriate.

Members sought further detail on support for carers, including training, professional support, and respite. Officers explained that carers were subject to ongoing monitoring and review and were supported through training, professional advice, and peer networks. Members also asked about retention. Officers said retention was generally good, but that the demands of the role meant continued support was essential to sustain the workforce.

Members were particularly interested in the lived experience shared during the meeting and noted the positive testimony from those directly involved in the service. The Committee recognised the value of lived experience in shaping future service development and emphasised the importance of continuing to gather and reflect user feedback in future reporting.

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

- A Member briefing note be developed to support councillors in promoting the Shared Lives service within their divisions.
- Officers would review opportunities to strengthen awareness and communication channels to support recruitment.

The meeting adjourned at 11:51, and reconvened at 11:57

24/26 CONSULTATION ON PROPOSED CHANGES TO ADULT SOCIAL CARE CONTRIBUTIONS POLICY (Agenda No. 7)

Councillor Rebekah Fletcher, Cabinet Member for Adults, Victoria Baran, Deputy Director, and Level Chingalembe, Head of Social Care Finance, introduced a report on the consultation regarding proposed changes to the Adult Social Care Contributions Policy.

The Cabinet Member introduced the report by outlining the scale of financial pressure facing Adult Social Care, with rising demand, increasing complexity of need, and wider reductions in government funding requiring the Council to identify savings whilst continuing to meet its statutory duties under the Care Act 2014. Officers advised that the Council supports over 6,800 adults and spends approximately £330 million per annum on Adult Social Care services.

The report set out three principal proposals. First, reducing the Disability Related Expenditure (DRE) allowance from 35% to 25% of disability benefits, while retaining the ability for individuals to request a full assessment where their actual costs exceed the standard allowance. Secondly, introducing a flat-rate charge of £10 per day for transport arranged by Adult Social Care. Thirdly, introducing a charge for all users of telecare services, increasing from the current £6 per week to the full cost of approximately £9.87 per week.

Officers explained that benchmarking indicated Oxfordshire's current 35% DRE allowance was significantly higher than most other authorities, and that the proposed 25% rate would align more closely with typical levels of disability-related expenditure. It was emphasised that this would operate as a standard allowance rather than a fixed cap, with individuals still able to undergo a full assessment and receive a higher allowance where their disability-related costs exceed the standard rate.

The proposals formed part of a wider package of measures to address a forecast £5.4 million funding gap in 2026/27 and were expected to generate approximately

£0.5 million in that year, rising to around £1.2 million on a full-year basis in future years.

Members sought clarification on the policy intent and justification for the proposals. Whilst Officers emphasised that the changes would improve consistency, fairness, and alignment with national guidance, Members questioned the extent to which the proposals were driven by financial pressures. Officers advised that both factors were relevant, noting that the Council was required to take action to ensure financial sustainability whilst maintaining a lawful and equitable charging framework.

The Committee explored the proposal to reduce the DRE allowance from 35% to 25%, with Members acknowledging the benchmarking evidence that Oxfordshire's current rate was comparatively generous. However, Members raised concerns that the proposed reduction would represent a tangible financial impact on many service users, citing examples from the report which showed reductions of approximately £11.46 per week for higher-rate benefits and £7.67 for standard rates.

Members questioned whether alternative approaches, including a more gradual reduction, had been fully considered. Officers confirmed that alternative scenarios had been modelled at a high level but advised that the proposed approach reflected the scale and immediacy of the financial challenge. Members noted that limited comparative detail had been provided, which constrained the Committee's ability to assess proportionality.

A significant part of the discussion focussed on the operation of the revised DRE model. Members sought reassurance regarding the extent to which service users would be required to evidence expenditure. Officers clarified that the proposed model retained a standard 25% allowance which would apply automatically, with individual assessments only required where a person's costs exceeded that figure.

Members nevertheless expressed concern that this approach would increase reliance on case-by-case assessment and could therefore lead to greater administrative complexity for both staff and service users. Officers acknowledged that individual assessments were more resource-intensive but reiterated that the "top-up" model was intended to balance administrative efficiency with fairness.

The Committee then examined the proposal to introduce a £10 per day charge for transport arranged by Adult Social Care. Members noted that transport provision was already limited to circumstances where individuals could not reasonably access alternative options and queried the extent to which the proposed charge would generate additional income. Officers advised that, in many cases, transport costs could be met through disability benefits or considered as Disability Related Expenditure within financial assessments, meaning that income generation may vary.

Members raised concerns about the potential impact of transport charges on access to services and social participation, particularly where individuals relied on transport to access day opportunities or community support. Officers confirmed that exemptions and discretionary adjustments would remain available where required.

The Committee also considered the proposal to introduce charges for telecare services, noting that approximately 3,500 residents currently used the service. Members acknowledged that telecare provided preventative support but raised concerns regarding the potential impact of increasing charges from £6 to £9.87 per week and extending them to all users.

Members referred to the consultation material which identified mixed evidence regarding the extent to which telecare reduces demand on other services and queried whether the proposals risked creating a false economy if increased charges reduced uptake of preventative support services. Officers advised that benchmarking indicated such charges were common across other authorities but acknowledged that behavioural impacts and wider system effects were difficult to predict with certainty.

Members also considered the cumulative impact of the proposals, particularly for individuals affected by multiple changes simultaneously, including reduced DRE allowance alongside new or increased charges. Concerns were raised regarding affordability for those just above eligibility thresholds. Officers confirmed that statutory safeguards would remain in place, including Minimum Income Guarantee requirements, and that discretionary adjustments could be applied on a case-by-case basis.

The Committee **AGREED** to make recommendations under the following heading:

- That Cabinet demonstrates how the proposed policy changes are in line with the Oxfordshire Way.
- That Cabinet demonstrates how the proposed changes would not result in a disproportionate increase in administrative costs or complexity for either the Council or service users and represent an efficient and proportionate use of resources.
- That Cabinet considers the potential disproportionate impact of the proposed telecare and transport charges on more vulnerable groups, and sets out the mitigations or safeguards available, taking into account the risk of additional administrative burden.

25/26 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 8)

The Committee **AGREED** to the forward work programme. Officers would discuss the scope and potential for an item of Disabled Facilities Grant (DFG).

26/26 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER (Agenda No. 9)

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

27/26 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet response to the report on the Unpaid Carer Strategy.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing