

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 4 April 2025 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 12.00 pm

Present:

Voting Members: Councillor Bob Johnston - Acting Chair
Councillor Brad Baines
Councillor Ted Fenton
Councillor Damian Haywood
Councillor Kieron Mallon
Councillor Calum Miller
Councillor Glynis Phillips
Councillor Alison Rooke

Other Members in Attendance: Councillor Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council
Councillor Pete Sudbury, Deputy Leader of the Council with responsibility for Climate Change, Environment & Future Generations
Councillor Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance
Councillor Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management

Officers: Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer
Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways
Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place
Nigel Tipple, LEP Chief Executive
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.

9/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from Cllr Reeves, substituted by Cllr Fenton, and Cllr Fatemian.

10/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

11/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The minutes for the meeting held on 17th January 2025 were **APPROVED** as a true and accurate record.

12/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

13/25 BUDGET MANAGEMENT MONITORING REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Cllr Andrew Gant, Cabinet Member for Transport Management, Cllr Pete Sudbury, Deputy Leader of the Council with responsibility for Climate Change, Environment & Future Generations, Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer, Paul Fermer, Director of Environment and Highways, and Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, attended to present a report on Budget Management Monitoring Report (BMMR).

The Cabinet Member for Finance introduced the BMMR, noting that the Council was heading in the right direction, being run prudently and effectively.

Moving quickly to questions, the Executive Director of Resources stated that achieving the same level of planned savings next year as this year would be addressed in the forthcoming year's budget. This meant this year's budget should not affect next year's, as any unachievable savings would have been managed during budget planning.

The inquiry about including the metric for household waste reuse, recycling, or composting in the report was addressed by the Director of Environment and Highways. Although managed by districts, this legacy indicator remained as the indicator originally agreed upon through the waste partnership.

Another inquiry questioned whether the limited KPIs for environment and highways suggested missed targets. The Director clarified that the small number of KPIs represented broader monitoring efforts. It was agreed that there may be a need to review and increase KPIs to reflect current priorities like road conditions, gully cleaning, and road safety.

The meeting paused at 10:19 to fix a technical issue, and restarted at 10:27

Concerns were raised about removing the customer satisfaction metric for the customer service centre, especially with the new telephony platform. The Cabinet Member for Finance explained the reason to do so was due to a lack of baseline data. The need to assess customer satisfaction was acknowledged, as well as a plan to refine and reintroduce the metric once baseline data was available. Ensuring the new system provides excellent service remains vital.

Members asked if data on external agency responses, especially from Thames Water, was collected and shareable due to frequent issues. The Director of Highways and Environment stated that while extensive data on FixMyStreet and other inquiries existed, specific metrics on external agency responses were not detailed. Direct reporting to agencies like Thames Water provided immediate feedback, which was not possible through the Council's system. Emphasis was placed on maintaining the feedback loop.

The inquiry into KPIs for section 106 agreements highlighted its importance and noted delays in implementation. Concerns were raised about approximately £250 million of held funds, mostly allocated to education projects. The Director of Economy and Place mentioned that strategic risks were being addressed and would be updated in the risk register. A detailed report was to be presented at the next Place Overview and Scrutiny meeting in April.

Cllr Sudbury left the meeting at 10:50.

Members addressed the importance of delivering Oxfordshire core schemes with public support and how this support was measured to mitigate associated risks. The Cabinet Member for Transport Management confirmed that public support was crucial, and various methods, including formal consultations and stakeholder engagement, were used to gauge it.

The Executive Director of Resources explained that the residual risks of greatest concern included financial resilience and cybersecurity, with priority actions being taken to address these. It was also explained that the financial risks associated with the High Needs Block in SEND were captured within the financial resilience risk, and it was noted that this risk had likely increased due to the end of the statutory override without further information from the government.

The Executive Director of Resources explained that the £10.5 million underspend, in the Council's Overall Financial Position, for 2024-2025 stemmed from higher interest on balances, lower pay inflation, and unused social care contingencies. These funds were discussed for financial contingencies and reserves to mitigate future risks, including funding reforms and local government reorganisation.

The Executive Director of Resources explained the £4.7 million underspend, in the Growth Deal Programme, was due to delays in Osney Mead, Kennington Bridge, and Steventon Lightning projects, caused by a mixture of slippage, planning decisions and judicial reviews. To use the growth deal funding by the deadline, funds were reallocated to other schemes, allowing the Council to claim the full housing and growth deal funding. The delayed projects could then proceed by using the already identified funding from the 'switched' projects.

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

- Recycling KPI: Review and update the recycling KPI in light of Extended Producer Responsibility (EPR).

- Customer Service Centre Satisfaction: Retain a measure of satisfaction with the customer service centre despite changes to the system.
- Public Support for Core Schemes: The Council should measure and report public support for core schemes as part of the BMMR report.
- Residual Risks: Provide commentary on the actions taken to reduce residual risks in the risk register (wording to be agreed with the Executive Director of Resources)

Cllr Mallon left the meeting at this stage.

14/25 LOCAL ENTERPRISE PARTNERSHIP INTEGRATION (Agenda No. 6)

Cllr Liz Leffman, Leader of the Council, Cllr Dan Levy, Cabinet Member for Finance, Lorna Baxter, Executive Director of Resources and Section 151 Officer Robin Rogers, Director of Economy and Place, and Nigel Tipple, LEP Chief Executive, attended to present a report on the Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP) Integration.

The Leader of the Council introduced the report on the integration of the LEP into the County Council, noting that an interim business plan for 2025/26 had been approved which aligned with the Council's strategic objectives. The Leader also noted a new board had been formed, inviting former LEP board members to join the Economic Partnership Board. The Leader also informed the committee that the LEP had been renamed Enterprise Oxfordshire (EO) as part of this integration.

The LEP Chief Executive confirmed the transition effective from April 1st, 2025, and assured continued operation under the new name. He highlighted maintaining existing programmes, securing government funding, aligning with Council priorities, and appointing an independent business chair for the EO's board and formation of the Oxfordshire Economic Partnership Board as the EO's key areas of activity following its integration.

Concerns were raised about the governance of EO's integration, questioning why the County Council had established a complex governance structure and did not instead simply absorb the EO's functions. The Leader and LEP Chief Executive explained that establishing EO as a separate company allowed flexibility for commercial activities. They clarified that the new governance structure, including the Shareholder Committee, independent members, and auditors, did not add significant costs but ensured operational flexibility and aligned with strategic objectives.

Members examined the financial liabilities of EO, questioning if the County Council would inherit these liabilities, including staff costs, as the sole shareholder. The LEP Chief Executive clarified that existing funding streams covered most liabilities, but the County Council, as the sole shareholder, would ultimately hold the underlying liability. If the funding from government grants or other sources were to dry up, the County Council might need to provide financial support to ensure the company's viability, but EO had an operating reserve for unforeseen expenses or liquidation.

Members were concerned about the impact of establishing new strategic mayoral authorities on the plans and ongoing activities of EO. The Leader of the Council clarified that Oxfordshire aspired to be a driving force behind any such strategic mayoral authority in the region. The emphasis was placed on formulating a strategic economic plan that would outline Oxfordshire's priorities, which would subsequently inform discussions with the newly elected mayor. This proactive strategy aimed to ensure that Oxfordshire's requirements and goals were explicitly conveyed and incorporated into the overarching regional strategy.

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

- suggested that the Audit and Governance Committee should review the governance arrangements of Enterprise Oxfordshire in a year's time, including examples of how decisions were made throughout the year. It also proposed that the Performance and Corporate Services Overview and Scrutiny Committee should review the performance of the organisation in a year to assess how well the new model has delivered its business plan.
- It was recommended that the financial liabilities and resilience of Enterprise Oxfordshire should be clearly documented and monitored, ensuring that the organisation has adequate reserves to cover unexpected costs and maintain operational stability.

15/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER (Agenda No. 7)

The Committee **NOTED** the action and recommendation tracker, and the updates provided on previous recommendations.

16/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN (Agenda No. 8)

The Committee **AGREED** the proposed work programme.

17/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS (Agenda No. 9)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to the committee's recommendations on the following reports:

- Commercial Strategy Update
- Community Asset Transfer Policy
- Updated Funding and Budget Proposals 2025/26 – 2027/28

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

