



EDUCATION AND YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 26 September 2025 commencing at 10.03 am and finishing at 12.43 pm.

Present:

Voting Members:

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

Co-Optee Members:

Fraser Long (Virtual)

**Other Members in
Attendance:**

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People

Officers:

Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services
Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement
Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education
Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention
Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care
Jaswinder Disially, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency)
Richard Doney, Scrutiny Officer

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.

43/25 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND TEMPORARY APPOINTMENTS (Agenda No. 1)

Apologies were received from co-optees Katie N and Peace Nnaji.

Apologies were also received from Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, who was expected to arrive late.

44/25 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS (Agenda No. 2)

There were none.

45/25 MINUTES

(Agenda No. 3)

The Committee **APPROVED** the minutes of the meeting held on 11 July 2025 as a true and accurate record, subject to the following amendments:

- Duplication Error: It was noted that two paragraphs in the minutes were duplicated due to a copy and paste error.
- Unclear Paragraph: The first non-italicised paragraph on page 3 was described as unclear regarding who invited whom and clarification was requested.

46/25 PETITIONS AND PUBLIC ADDRESS

(Agenda No. 4)

There were none.

47/25 OXFORDSHIRE SAFEGUARDING CHILDREN'S PARTNERSHIP - ANNUAL REPORT

(Agenda No. 5)

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention, and Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet Member introduced the annual report emphasising safeguarding's complexity and the Partnership's commitment to supporting all children, especially those at risk, with oversight from the Independent Scrutineer. The Partnership's focus on driving meaningful action was highlighted. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement presented the finalised report, detailing the 'working together' arrangement, recent leadership changes for improved accountability, and strengthening governance. Priority actions included multi-agency work on exploitation and neglect, and preparing for Families First changes.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- New screening tools for identifying neglect had only recently been introduced, so evidence of improved outcomes was not yet available. The tools were more concise and covered a broader range of neglect indicators, including emotional, educational, and medical needs. Practitioners across social care, health visiting, and schools were trained in using the Graded Care Profile 2, with usage tracked through performance reports. A home conditions tool was also introduced to standardise assessments. Development involved input from paediatricians and schools, and effectiveness would be monitored over the next year using key performance indicators across agencies and referral points.

- How the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements were being embedded consistently across all organisations within the partnership, with a particular focus on how the partnership was addressing the issue of child-on-child exploitation. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement stated that arrangements aligned with national guidance, prioritising performance and quality assurance through multi-agency audits. Schools also played a crucial role, with positive engagement across the system and a commitment to scrutinising concerns and good practice. The Partnership worked with community safety groups, reviewed national research, and had a structured approach to early identification of vulnerability, particularly for children missing education. While child-on-child exploitation was not a major issue in Oxfordshire, vigilance remained, with specialist teams and ongoing initiatives supporting a wider group of children.
- Members raised concerns about online exploitation and mobile phone use among children. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding highlighted strong collaboration with schools, including data sharing on missing children and multi-agency panels involving school safeguarding leads. The vulnerability of children not attending school was discussed, with emphasis on early identification and graduated support. Concerns about parental awareness led to calls for a county-wide campaign to educate and empower families. The complexity of digital safeguarding was acknowledged, with rapid technological change requiring support for both parents and children.

On mobile phone bans, it was noted that some authorities had introduced restrictions in schools, which improved safeguarding on-site. However, children not in school remained more vulnerable. National evidence suggested smartphones should not be unsupervised before age 14, yet very young children were often seen with them. The Committee concluded that, while banning phones could help, broader strategies were needed to address digital risks effectively.

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

- How the strategic voice of children, families, and communities was incorporated into safeguarding, with particular interest in how the voice of the child was heard in practice. The Director of Children's Services emphasised the importance of the child's voice in safeguarding, starting with early intervention and extending to social care. Tools such as the "Mind of My Own" app enabled children to communicate directly with professionals, and children were encouraged to take part in meetings and reviews. Experiences of children in care were used to improve practice and resources. The Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement noted that a dedicated role ensured children's voices influenced strategic decisions.
- The Oxford University Hospitals Trust (OUH) was no longer a direct member of the Partnership following the transition from a board to a partnership. The Director of Children's Services explained that the former safeguarding board had been replaced by a strategic safeguarding partnership, as required by law. This Partnership was led by three strategic safeguarding leads: the Chief Executive of the County Council, the Chief Executive of the Integrated Care Board, and the

Chief Constable of Thames Valley Police. OUH continued to participate through involvement in subgroups and provided assurance through the health system.

- Whether youth groups and churches were involved in safeguarding and youth hubs. The Director of Children's Services explained that the reorganised adolescent service now integrated youth support and exploitation response, improving local partnerships. Community organisations and youth voice were central to this work. For example, Blackbird Leys Youth Hub offered universal access and targeted programmes on exploitation and decision-making. The hub model acted as a one-stop shop, shaped by young people's input, aiming to deliver meaningful impact through integrated services and community engagement.
- Whether the reported decrease in the number of children subject to child protection plans was necessarily a positive outcome, or if it could indicate that some children were being missed. Officers explained that decisions around child protection interventions were made on a multi-agency basis and that Oxfordshire operated a family safeguarding model, which typically resulted in lower numbers of child protection plans due to greater early intervention and support for families. It was stated that, while the lower numbers were viewed as positive, there was no complacency, and regular audits and reviews were conducted to ensure the right children were being supported at the right level.
- The Chair supported presenting Child Safeguarding Practice Reviews to the scrutiny committee, in public or private as needed, for transparency and learning. Previous cases like Bullfinch and Jacobs had shaped local practice, notably with excluded children. Officers agreed to present future reviews, noting timing depends on ongoing legal issues, and highlighted that committee scrutiny supports accountability.

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

- Members to be provided with a list of safeguarding resources.
- Data related to self-harm to be included in the next annual report.
- The new safeguarding strategy to be brought to the committee once written.
- The effectiveness of new screening tools should be specifically addressed in the next annual report.

The Committee **AGREED** to an observation about the importance of public accountability and the visibility of safeguarding and to a recommendation under the following heading:

- That the Council should consider how best to deploy a sustained, smart educational campaign to support parents, particularly regarding online threats.

48/25 YOUTH JUSTICE ANNUAL PLAN 2025-26

(Agenda No. 6)

The Committee invited Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Carol Douch, Assistant Director for Safeguarding, Quality Assurance, Partnerships, and Improvement, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, Jessie Dobson, Service Manager: Adolescence and Prevention, and Delia Mann, Deputy Director Children's Social Care, to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet member presented the annual youth justice plan discussing challenges for youth at risk, and emphasising prevention and restorative justice, supported by a young person's account. The Deputy Director of Children's Social Care described the plan as a multi-agency initiative, highlighted issues like first-time entrants, disproportionality, and education, explained the inspection framework's increased emphasis on victims, and stressed targeted interventions, partnership work, and data analysis.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- Regarding the increase in SEND numbers, the correlation with mental health concerns, and the role of Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) in supporting young people with these needs. The Deputy Director Children's Social Care explained that early identification of needs was key to ensuring appropriate support, and that a speech and language officer had recently been recruited as part of a preventative approach. It was noted that previously there had not always been preventative support before children entered the criminal justice system, and that this approach now extended to mental health. Additionally, it was confirmed that a CAMHS clinician sat on the Youth Justice Board, providing both consultation and direct work with families, ensuring a strong connection between CAMHS and youth justice services.
- How mental health concerns and difficulties were recognised and addressed for children at risk of entering the youth justice system. Officers outlined that Oxfordshire had developed a multi-agency early help and prevention strategy, involving CAMHS, health services, and youth support teams, to identify and support children early. It was highlighted that there was a continuum of prevention, including parenting groups, targeted youth support, and clinical psychological input, ensuring that mental health needs were addressed from early help through to more intensive interventions, with close collaboration between services to support children at each stage.
- What the role of Oxford Health and other mental health organisations was in supporting children and young people, particularly those who might not be known to social care but were in the health system due to mental health concerns. It was explained that Oxfordshire was developing a network of family hubs, which would provide universal and targeted provision, including mental health support, through multidisciplinary teams and closer links with schools and community services. It was acknowledged that while the ideal system was not yet fully in place, there was ongoing work to design integrated early help and prevention strategies in

partnership with health colleagues, aiming to expand capacity and ensure equitable input from mental health partners.

- What factors contributed to historically elevated crime rates among individuals aged 18-21, the identified trend of criminal behaviour emerging at increasingly younger ages, and relevant prevention strategies and indicators of deprivation. The Service Manager described that recent analysis had shown a shift, with some offences now more common among 13–15-year-olds. This trend was linked to specific pockets of deprivation, children not attending school, and challenging upbringings. It was noted that while the issue was not widespread across Oxfordshire, these factors were significant predictors. Prevention strategies included early identification, targeted youth support, detached youth work in hotspot areas, and new intervention programmes funded by the police and crime commissioner, all aiming to address risk factors and support young people before they became entrenched in criminal behaviour.
- Whether factors such as boredom or a lack of youth resources contributed, and whether interventions like school-based classes on conflict resolution and negotiation skills were in place. Officers confirmed that positive activities and youth provision were essential for prevention, making families aware of resources and ensuring free activities are accessible, particularly via holiday programmes. The youth service collaborated with schools and communities to coordinate provision, supported by recent government funding aimed at rebuilding local youth services. The importance of adapting strategies to Oxfordshire's diverse geography was also highlighted, with rural isolation and local challenges informing the design of targeted interventions alongside those for urban areas.
- The SEND quality mark process and the role of the SEND representative on the youth justice panel were discussed. It was clarified that the SEND quality mark was a recent initiative in Oxfordshire, intended to ensure the diverse needs of children are appropriately recognised and addressed. The process included self-assessment, supplemented by independent audits and external validation, thereby preventing potential bias. The SEND representative served as an advocate on the youth justice panel, contributing specialist knowledge to help address areas identified for improvement and was tasked with reporting on SEND-related activities between board meetings.
- White children were most likely to have committed a serious offence, while children of mixed heritage were 1.4 times more likely to be cautioned or sentenced. Members were concerned by the apparent inequality displayed here. Officers confirmed that the data indicated a significant inequality, with non-white children more likely to be referred to the youth offending team and to receive formal orders. Work was underway with Thames Valley Police and the Youth Justice Board to better understand and address these disparities, including examining stop and search practices and the adoption of restorative approaches such as Outcome 22, which aimed to divert children from the criminal justice system.
- A challenge was raised about the need for increased youth service funding, stressing youth development should be essential and widely accessible, with

professional officers and greater government investment. The Cabinet Member agreed that there was now less universal youth provision in Oxfordshire than there had been in the past but confirmed expanding and coordinating provision was a strategic priority, with plans to support teenagers' well-being and introduce adolescent and prevention services.

49/25 ATTENDANCE

(Agenda No. 7)

Cllr Sean Gaul, Cabinet member for Children and Young People, Lisa Lyons, Director of Children's Services, Annette Perrington, Interim Deputy Director: Education, and Jaswinder Disialy, Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency), were invited to present the report and to answer the Committee's questions.

The Cabinet Member invited the Committee to provide advice or recommendations that could be supported with political backing.

The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) summarised the attendance team's structure, main functions, and operations. She outlined four focus areas: attendance improvement, licensing and compliance, elective home education support, and children missing education. The Assistant Director described their responsibilities, noted recent policy updates, and discussed monitoring strategies and collaboration with schools and parents.

The Committee raised the following questions and comments:

- Availability of data comparing urban and rural attendance in Oxfordshire, and development of targeted strategies to improve attendance in each area. The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) agreed that presenting such data would be useful and stated that this matter would be included in future presentations, highlighting consideration of the distinct challenges found in urban and rural areas.
- The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) explained that she was particularly interested in the transition period for parents and acknowledged the value of collecting parental feedback. The Assistant Director agreed it would be beneficial to capture this information and consider expanding the approach if it proved effective.
- The discussion included whether there were any schools with notably good attendance and what practices contributed to their results for possible implementation elsewhere. The Assistant Director: Schools and Settings (Sufficiency) responded that current efforts had focused primarily on schools with low attendance but acknowledged the importance of also identifying and learning from schools with high attendance. It was noted that some schools, within and outside the county, were recognised for strong attendance, and that hubs were being established to facilitate sharing of best practices.
- The Interim Deputy Director: Education explained that attendance related to wider issues like exploitation, exclusion, and youth justice involvement. She noted that

new post-pandemic guidance emphasised multi-agency work and increased local authority responsibility for tracking attendance. Improved data helped to identify students with persistent absences, but challenges remained, especially regarding mental health and parental choices.

50/25 COMMITTEE FORWARD WORK PLAN

(Agenda No. 8)

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

The Director of Children's Services suggested including the virtual school annual report and a provisional attainment update in the November forward plan, as final exam data will not be available until February.

The SEND Area inspection monitoring visit was taking place from 15 September 2025-2 October 2025. The resulting report was unlikely to be available before Christmas, but the Director would discuss with the Scrutiny Officer when it would be possible to report to the Committee.

A "lessons learned review" of Woodeaton Manor School was proposed and agreed to by the Committee. The terms of reference for the review group would be drafted and presented for the Committee's approval at its November meeting.

51/25 COMMITTEE ACTION AND RECOMMENDATION TRACKER

(Agenda No. 9)

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

52/25 RESPONSES TO SCRUTINY RECOMMENDATIONS

(Agenda No. 10)

The Committee **NOTED** the Cabinet responses to Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny recommendations on:

- The Children's Homes Update
- The Education Other Than At School policy
- S.19 of the Education Act: Response to The Report Of The Local Government And Social Care Ombudsman
- Home to School Transport Policy

The timing of the EOTAS guidance briefing would be coordinated between the Director of Children's Services and Scrutiny Officer.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing

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