

## **Divisions Affected - All**

# **EDUCATION & YOUNG PEOPLE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 27 February 2026**

## **Terms of Reference for a Scrutiny Review Panel: Woodeaton Manor School**

**Report by the Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer**

### **RECOMMENDATION**

1. **The Committee is RECOMMENDED to:**
  - i. **AGREE** membership allocations
  - ii. **AGREE** with the approach and schedule of meetings set out in the report;
  - iii. **APPOINT** the membership.

### **Executive Summary**

2. At its meeting on 26 September 2025, the Education and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to establish a working group or review panel (the Panel) to examine the circumstances and communications surrounding the direction by the Secretary of State for Education that Woodeaton Manor School must become an academy. These Terms of Reference set out the purpose, membership, working arrangements, limitations, confidentiality requirements, and reporting expectations of the Panel.
3. Members are asked to note that this is a time-limited scrutiny review Panel formed under Part 6.2(5) of the Council's constitution and is, by its nature, not a statutory review. It will be focused on the potential for learning lessons and improving practice and will explore how the Council responded when the school received a mandatory academisation order. The Panel's work will not focus on employment matters, nor will it have powers to compel the release of certain restricted or personal information.
4. The Scrutiny Review Panel is established to examine the communications, processes, and actions taken by Oxfordshire County Council during the period in which Woodeaton Manor School received its mandatory academisation order. The Panel will explore the context in which the Secretary of State takes such a decision and will consider the remit any council has in such a

circumstance. The Panel will establish what is expected to happen ordinarily and whether that happened in this instance. The Panel will seek to identify any lessons that could be learned and consider whether, upon receiving the notice, the Council acted as it reasonably ought to have done. The review will focus on the Council's role, recognising that Woodeaton Manor School operated as a foundation school without a foundation from 1 April 2008, and that staff in such schools are employed by the governing board, not the Council.

5. All meetings will be held in private. Members should be sensitive to the possibility that the Panel may be provided with information that would be exempt from disclosure. All evidence and discussions should, therefore, remain confidential during the work of the Panel before it is able to assess what can be made public. Documents provided to the Panel must not be shared or circulated without explicit authorisation. Members must comply with the Council's Code of Conduct and data protection obligations.
6. The final report will be public but there may be information within it which is exempt from publication under Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972, as it includes information relating to an individual or to the financial or business affairs of the authority.
7. The review is not a statutory inquiry and does not have unlimited powers to obtain information or compel witnesses. The review panel has no statutory rights to information other than those that belong to the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee, which rules are set out largely in the Access to Information Procedure Rules at Part 8 of the Constitution. Members of Council are not entitled to receive employment records, given the restrictions of both GDPR and the Data Protection Act 2018 and of employment confidentiality requirements.
8. The Panel will focus on communications, decision-making processes, and the Council's responsibilities during the academisation process.

## **Membership**

9. The Panel will consist of five county councillors appointed by the Committee.
10. Part 6.2(5) states that appointments to review panels "will be made by the relevant scrutiny committee, ensuring political balance as far as possible." Standard proportional allocation, in accordance with section 15 of the Local Government and Housing Act 1989 and using the calculations as set out in the report to Council on 20 May 2025, would comprise: 3 Liberal Democrat Group members, 1 Labour and Co-operative Party Group member, 1 Oxfordshire Alliance Group member.
11. Whereas a sub-committee must ensure, under the provisions of the same Local Government and Housing Act 1989, that the majority is drawn from the ruling administration, that is not the case for a working group or review panel

which is not defined in statute. It would, therefore, be open to the Committee to appoint members from each political group represented on the Committee and, to do that whilst respecting the Council's political balance whilst not being limited by strict political proportionality. An alternative composition could comprise: 2 Liberal Democrat Group members, 1 Labour and Co-operative Party Group member, 1 Oxfordshire Alliance Group member, 1 Green Party Group member.

12. The Panel will elect its Chair and Deputy Chair at its first meeting. In the Chair's absence, the Deputy Chair will preside over the meeting. In line with Part 6.1B(7) of the Council's Constitution, substitution will not apply where any member appointed by the Committee is unable to attend.

## Meetings

13. The Panel will meet up to four times, each meeting lasting no more than two hours. All meetings will be held in private.

### Meeting 1:

- Election of Chair and Deputy Chair and agreement of lines of enquiry. During this meeting, the Panel will identify groups that it wishes to receive evidence from.

### Meeting 2:

- Consideration of written submissions from interested parties. Anyone may write to the Panel c/o [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk) to express an interest in providing submissions.

### Meeting 3:

- Consideration of oral submissions at County Hall if members have identified, through their consideration of written submissions, that they wish to have the opportunity to ask questions of those who have earlier provided written evidence.

### Meeting 4:

- Consideration by members of responses or clarifications arising from earlier meetings.

14. Following completion of its work, the Panel will draft a final report setting out findings, an overview of evidence received, lessons learned, and any recommendations to Cabinet proposed by the Panel. The report will be presented to the Education and Young People Overview & Scrutiny Committee for endorsement.
15. The Panel will disband following the Committee's consideration of the final report unless further work is commissioned.

## Corporate Policies and Priorities

16. The Panel will seek to explore how the Council can create opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential as well as working with local partners for societal benefit. These would both contribute to making Oxfordshire greener, fairer, and healthier.

## Financial Implications

17. There are no additional financial implications that arise from the work of the Panel other than the potential for councillors to claim for travel expenses.

Comments checked by:

Tim Chapple, Strategic Financing & Investment Manager,  
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## Legal Implications

18. The requirement for councils in England to establish overview and scrutiny committees, and their legal powers, are set out in sections 9F to 9FI of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011. How overview and scrutiny committees function at Oxfordshire County Council is set out in Part 6 of the Council's Constitution. Part 9 of the Constitution includes the Code of Conduct as well as, at Part 9.2, the Protocol on Members' Rights and Responsibilities. The implications of these, and other legislation, is set out in the main body of the report.

Comments checked by:

Jay Akbar, Head of Legal & Governance, [jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:jay.akbar@oxfordshire.gov.uk)

## Staff Implications

19. There is capacity within the Scrutiny team to service this Panel.

## Consultations

20. None arising from this report. The Panel will invite interested parties to contact the Scrutiny team at [scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk](mailto:scrutiny@oxfordshire.gov.uk) in order to submit written contributions for the Panel's consideration in line with the scope set out above.

Anita Bradley  
Director of Law and Governance & Monitoring Officer

Annex: Nil

Background papers: Nil

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February 2026