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Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Committee: Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Date: Tuesday 15 July 2025

Time: 6.30 pm

Venue: 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD

Membership

Councillor Lynne Parsons (Chair)

Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor Gemma Coton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke

Councillor Phil Chapman (Vice-Chair)

Councillor John Broad
Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Zoe McLernon
Councillor Barry Wood

Substitutes Any member of the relevant political group, excluding Executive members

AGENDA

Overview and Scrutiny Members should not normally be subject to the party whip. Where a member is subject to a party whip they must declare this at the beginning of the meeting and it should be recorded in the minutes.

1. Apologies for Absence and Notification of Substitute Members

2. Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare any interest and the nature of that interest which they may have in any of the items under consideration at this meeting.

3. Minutes (Pages 5 - 8)

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2025.

4. Chair's Announcements

To receive communications from the Chair.

5. Urgent Business

The Chair to advise whether they have agreed to any item of urgent business being admitted to the agenda.

6. Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25 (Pages 9 - 42)

Report of the Assistant Director – Law & Governance/Monitoring Officer.

Purpose of report

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and approve the draft annual report for 2024-25, for submission to full Council.

Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To consider and provide feedback on the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2024-25.
- 1.2 To approve the annual report for submission to full Council.

7. Work Programme Update

The Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee are meeting with Corporate Leadership Team on 8 July, to discuss the items on the work programme and suggested timings and format for each one. The work programme will be published as a supplement to the agenda after that meeting has taken place.

Committee members will have the opportunity to propose further subjects for consideration, and should bear in mind the five roles of scrutiny:

- Performance Monitoring
- Policy Development
- Policy Review
- Holding the Executive to Account – the latest version of the Executive Forward Plan can be viewed via the [Cherwell District Council website](#)
- External Scrutiny

For Information - Scrutiny Guide

The Scrutiny Guide is attached for information and reference.

Councillors are requested to collect any post from their pigeon hole in the Members' Lounge at the end of the meeting.

Information about this Meeting

Apologies for Absence

Apologies for absence should be notified to democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk or 01295 221534 prior to the start of the meeting.

Declarations of Interest

Members are asked to declare interests at item 2 on the agenda or if arriving after the start of the meeting, at the start of the relevant agenda item.

Local Government and Finance Act 1992 – Budget Setting, Contracts & Supplementary Estimates

Members are reminded that any member who is two months in arrears with Council Tax must declare the fact and may speak but not vote on any decision which involves budget setting, extending or agreeing contracts or incurring expenditure not provided for in the agreed budget for a given year and could affect calculations on the level of Council Tax.

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Webcasting and Broadcasting Notice

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If you make a representation to the meeting, you will be deemed by the council to have consented to being recorded. By entering the Council Chamber or joining virtually, you are consenting to being recorded and to the possible use of those images and sound recordings for webcasting and/or training purposes.

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Queries Regarding this Agenda

Please contact Emma Faulkner / Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections
democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk, 01295 221534

Shiraz Sheikh
Monitoring Officer

Published on Monday 7 July 2025

Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Minutes of a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee held at 39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD, on 17 June 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor Phil Chapman (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Councillor John Broad

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed

Councillor Frank Ideh

Councillor Harry Knight

Councillor Simon Lytton

Councillor Zoe McLernon

Councillor Barry Wood

Substitute Members:

Councillor Dorothy Walker (In place of Councillor Gemma Coton)

Councillor Amanda Watkins (In place of Councillor Lynne Parsons)

Councillor Besmira Brasha (In place of Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke)

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Lynne Parsons

Councillor Gordon Blakeway

Councillor Gemma Coton

Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke

Officers:

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Ian Boll, Corporate Director Communities

Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

Shona Ware, Assistant Director Customer Focus

Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer

Officers Attending Virtually:

Ed Potter, Assistant Director Environmental Services

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Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

10 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 3 June 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

11 **Chair's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

12 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

13 **Finance and Performance Monitoring Report End of Year 2024-2025**

The Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the council's performance position at the end of the financial year 2024-2025.

In introducing the report, the Assistant Director – Customer Focus advised that the council had performed well against its objectives, which consisted of 36 Business Plan Measures, 15 Annual Delivery Plan actions, and 25 Equalities Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan activities. Of the 19 business plan measures 11 achieved their year-end target or were within the agreed tolerance, with the remaining eight measures missing their target and ending the year reporting red.

In response to a question relating to indicator BP 1.2.01, number of households living in temporary accommodation, and the possible reasons for the increase in demand, the Assistant Director – Housing & Wellbeing advised that many factors contributed to the increase. These included some landlords leaving the market due to the impending Renters Rights Bill, leading to a reduction in available properties; a static local housing allowance rate that wasn't keeping pace with rental amounts; ongoing cost of living implications since the pandemic; and more complex cases with health needs being presented.

In response to a question regarding the £0.663m overspend in Environmental Service which was primarily due to an increased usage of agency staff within the waste collection team, the Assistant Director of Environmental Services explained that due to the urgent nature of the service agency staff had to be used to supplement any shortages to enable the service to continue. The service had experienced an increase in sickness absence, including some long term absences, and this had resulted in additional agency staff being required.

The Corporate Director – Communities added that the way the budget was profiled across the financial year meant that the year-end report always

showed the department as having an overspend, due to the fluctuations in agency staff use across the year.

In response to a follow-up question on support available for staff with regular or long-term sickness absence, the Corporate Director – Communities explained that the team worked alongside HR to signpost services and support available via the Employee Support Programme, as well as occupational health where required.

It was recommended and agreed by Committee that as the use of agency staff within Waste Service was necessary for the service to operate 'business as usual', Executive be recommended to consider how agency staff costs are included in departmental budgets.

Resolved

- (1) That the Council's End of year performance report for 2024/25 be noted.

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Work Programme Planning for 2025-2026

The Committee considered a list of suggested subjects to form the basis of the work programme for the 2025-26 municipal year.

The Chair summarised each suggested subject, taking questions, comments and views from the Committee as to whether they should be included on the indicative work programme.

Regarding Local Government Reform and whether there was a role for the Committee in the proposals, the Chair explained that officers had advised the subject would be considered by full Council, and therefore open to scrutiny by all Members. An overview on workstreams to date could be provided to the Committee if it were felt necessary.

The Committee agreed that as the subject was to be considered by full Council, it was not necessary to add it to the work programme.

Regarding a question relating to CDC employment policies, the Chair advised that the Personnel Committee and the Assistant Director of Human Resources would be better placed to address the queries in the first instance. The Committee agreed that it was not necessary to add the subject to the work programme.

In response to a question relating to the frequency of updates regarding the transformation programme, the Assistant Director – Customer Focus suggested quarterly reports may be most suitable initially but added that timing could be reviewed once work was underway.

In response to the Chair's request for any further subjects for consideration, a request was made for an item relating to housing developers' implementation

of section 106 obligations. There were many new housing developments across the district, and in some cases, developers were building the housing elements but not any of the additional facilities such as parks or other amenity infrastructure. The Corporate Director of Communities suggested that the performance of Section 106 delivery within the district.

The Chair referred to the three working groups that had been established in 2023-2024 and continued during the last municipal year: Climate Action; Food Insecurity; and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (joint with Personnel Committee) and asked for Members' views on whether the working groups should continue.

The Committee agreed that following the publication of the end of year reports, which made recommendations to the Executive, the Food Insecurity and Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion groups should not continue as Overview and Scrutiny Working Groups. It was suggested that officers discuss with relevant Portfolio Holders the best way to monitor and review future progress made on these subjects.

Regarding the Climate Action working group, the Corporate Director – Communities explained that there would be a role for the group during the updating of the Climate Action Strategy, but that work was not due to start until later in the year. It was suggested that the group continue once that work was underway.

Resolved

- (1) That the list of suggested subjects for the 2025-26 work programme (annexe to minutes as set out in the minute book) be approved.
- (2) That the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee work with officers to schedule the agreed items as appropriate.
- (3) That it be agreed that the Food Insecurity and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion working groups do not continue as Overview and Scrutiny Working Groups, and relevant officers from the service be requested to discuss with relevant Portfolio Holders the best way to monitor and review progress made on these subjects.
- (4) That the Climate Action continue later this Municipal Year, once work is underway to update the Climate Action Strategy.

The meeting ended at 7.55 pm

Chair:

Date:

This report is public	
Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report – 2024-25	
Committee	Overview and Scrutiny
Date of Committee	15 July 2025
Portfolio Holder presenting the report	Not applicable as this is a report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Date Portfolio Holder agreed report	N/A
Report of	Assistant Director – Law & Governance/Monitoring Officer

Purpose of report

For the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider and approve the draft annual report for 2024-25, for submission to full Council.

1. Recommendations

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To consider and provide feedback on the draft Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report for 2024-25.
- 1.2 To approve the annual report for submission to full Council.

2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has a constitutional obligation to “report annually to Council on function of their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate” (Constitution Part 4a, Committee Terms of Reference, section 5.2 point C).

Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
Finance	There are no financial implications. Rachel Ainsworth MAAT, Finance Business Partner (Resources Directorate). 27 June 2025

Legal	<p>Effective scrutiny is an important part of the decision making process in local government decision making. Having appropriate arrangements in place helps to provide good quality decision making for the Council.</p> <p>The Local Government Act 2000 established the requirement for overview and scrutiny committees in a local government context and our committee and this report help to ensure that we are complying with our statutory requirements.</p> <p>The report sets out the work which it has undertaken and the recommendations and follow-up actions which have been carried out as a result of its reviews.</p> <p>There are no legal implications arising directly as a result of this report.</p> <p>Denzil – John Turbervill Head of Legal Services, 7 July 2025</p>			
Risk Management	<p>There are no risk implications arising directly from this report. However, agreeing the recommendations of this report mitigates the risk of not being compliant with the Committee and Council's constitutional obligation.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance Team Leader, 02 July 2025</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
Equality Impact				Not applicable.
A Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
Climate & Environmental Impact				Not applicable.
ICT & Digital Impact				Not applicable.

Data Impact				Not applicable.
Procurement & subsidy				Not applicable.
Council Priorities	The work of OSC during 2024-25 covered all of the Council's priorities			
Human Resources	N/A			
Property	N/A			
Consultation & Engagement	None			

Supporting Information

3. Background

- 3.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC) has a constitutional obligation to “report annually to Council on function of their workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate” (Constitution Part 4a, Committee Terms of Reference, section 5.2 point C).

4. Details

- 4.1 The annual report provides a summary of the subjects covered by OSC during the previous Municipal Year, highlighting key observations and outcomes of discussions.
- 4.2 The report also provides a summary of work undertaken by four working groups during the course of the year.

5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection

- 5.1 The following alternative options have been identified and rejected for the reasons as set out below.

Option 1: Not to agree the recommendations. This is rejected, as this would lead to the Committee not meeting its constitutional obligation.

6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

- 6.1 The recommendations as set out are in the best interests of the Council and ensures OSC fulfils its constitutional obligation.

Decision Information

Key Decision	N/A as not an Executive report
Subject to Call in	N/A
If not, why not subject to call in	N/A
Ward(s) Affected	All

Document Information

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report 2024-25
Background Papers	None
Reference Papers	None
Report Author	Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer – Scrutiny & Democratic Lead
Report Author contact details	Democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk 01295 221534
Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)	



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2024/25

DRAFT1

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Foreword

This year has been significant for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as it has for the Council as a whole, with some particularly important issues coming before the Committee for review. There have been reviews of some high impact strategic policies and decisions for the Council, which have included the Proposed Cherwell Local Plan to 2042, the new Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy, the Council's new Transformation Programme and oversight of the Council's disposal of its offices at Bodicote House and its move to its new Council Offices at Castle Quay.

Through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee elected councillors have been able to provide assurance and accountability through questioning the Executive portfolio holders and senior officers on these and other important issues and also been able to make some contribution to the direction of policy through our recommendations to the Council's Executive.

We have also been able to provide oversight and scrutiny of some wider community issues and partnerships, including the review of Cherwell's Community Safety Partnership, with oral evidence from the Thames Valley Police, as well as the Chairman of the Partnership and the council's own Community Safety officers.

The work of the Committee has also often been timed to enable pre-decision scrutiny, so that the observations and recommendations from the committee can be made in advance of final decisions being made by the Executive, which makes sure that our work is well timed to be taken into consideration and make an impact.

In addition to the work of the main committee we have carried out in depth scrutiny inquiries through Scrutiny Working Groups, including a review of the Council's Climate Action strategy and the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion strategies. This has enabled us to draw on the wider involvement of the Council's members, through appointment to the Scrutiny Working Groups and to allow some additional time to consider these issues with the Executive portfolio holder and officers, as well as hearing from external expert witnesses from organisations outside of the Council, drawing on different perspectives.

These have included, notably, hearing evidence from Dr Marco Rauei from Oxford Brooks University and from David Cruchley from Oxfordshire Youth, who have kindly made time to share their knowledge and expertise as part of our scrutiny inquiries.

The Scrutiny Working Groups have also provided several scrutiny reports, that is, reports from the Committee setting out our agreed findings and recommendations from our in depth scrutiny inquiries carried out this year. This helps us to communicate more widely both internally and with the wider

community and provides a submission to the Council Executive and officers to consider.

There have also been opportunities for scrutiny members to review policies from other councils, as part of reflective review, such as reviewing equality and diversity strategies used by other councils in the development and refresh of our own.

Scrutiny Members have also been able to go outside of the formal committee setting with site visits to community settings such as the Banbury Larder, to see first hand the difference Council and community collaborative work is making on the ground and to meet and hear directly from the people involved.

All of these different approaches have contributed to inclusive decision making, providing a vehicle for elected councillors as community leaders to contribute, to include perspectives from external stakeholders and to provide greater assurance and accountability.

I have had the pleasure of chairing and leading the scrutiny committee over the past year, with I feel, some notable successes in proving effective accountability and valid contributions to the development of Council policy, for example, through the consideration of the proposed new Local Plan for public consultation. The work of the Committee is, however, a collective endeavour, with members of the committee working together constructively and to provide a "critical friend" to the Executive.

I would like to thank my colleagues on the committee for their collective efforts in helping to make this year a success for Scrutiny, in particular my Vice Chair, Councillor Nigel Simpson for his collaborative support, as well as to thank the Members of the Executive and officers of the Council who have appeared before the committee to present reports and answer questions from the Committee. I'd also like to thank the external witnesses who attended meetings and contributed, including the Thames Valley Police.

We've been able to play our part and contribution to Cherwell Council's governance and democratic arrangements and this Annual Scrutiny Report should provide a flavour of the work we have accomplished this year. I hope that this work can also provide a platform for the continued development and effectiveness of the scrutiny function in 2025-2026.

Councillor Isabel Creed
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2024 - 2025

1. Overview and Scrutiny at Cherwell District Council

- 1.1. Cherwell District Council established one Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake the statutory scrutiny function. This committee meets throughout the year to consider a range of issues across the Council departments and services to provide accountability and contribute to policy and service review.
- 1.2. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are led by elected Members of local authority councils and provide a check and balance to Council decision making and a vehicle for Members of the Council who are not part of the Council's Executive to contribute to the decision making process.
- 1.3. The Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were:
 - Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
 - Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice Chairman)
 - Councillor Gordon Blakeway
 - Councillor John Broad
 - Councillor Phil Chapman
 - Councillor Grace Conway Murray
 - Councillor Andrew Crichton
 - Councillor Frank Ideh
 - Councillor Harry Knight
 - Councillor Simon Lytton
 - Councillor Lynne Parsons
 - Councillor Barry Wood.



The Overview and Scrutiny Committee – in session.

- 1.4. The Committee meets six time a year (in addition to any special meetings) to consider issues across the range of council policy and service areas, which it selects and sets out in its Annual Scrutiny Work Programme. In addition to considering issues at its main committee meetings, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may establish Scrutiny Working Groups to consider matters in more depth and more informally outside of the main committee and report back.
- 1.5. After considering any issue, the Committee may make reports and recommendations to the Council's Executive, which is required to respond, setting out any actions it will take.
- 1.6. The Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's overall governance arrangements and central to the Council's democratic decision making. Through its scrutiny inquiries, the Committee also helps to drive improvement and development of Council services, as well as providing greater public accountability and transparency to decision making. It can help test out if policies, proposals and services and effective and provide best value.
- 1.7. In carrying out its scrutiny inquiries, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Working Groups can require Members of the Executive and senior officers to answers questions in committee, consider commissioned reports from Council departments and hear evidence from external organisations and people, including expert witnesses. This can help to add value to the decision making process by drawing on the knowledge of people and organisations both inside and outside of the Council and considering different perspectives.
- 1.8. Through out the year this has included pre-decision scrutiny, where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers an issue before the Executive makes a decision, which provides an opportunity for the Committee to contribute before the final decision is made.
- 1.9. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also has the power to "call in" a decision of the Executive for review before the decision is implemented. Any five members of the Council can also trigger referral of an Executive decision for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Although this provision is used by exception, this provides an additional democratic check where Members may wish for an Executive decision to be more widely considered. There were no Cal In requests in 2024-2025.
- 1.10. More information on the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee and links to all of its meetings and published papers can be accessed online at:
<https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=116#:~:text=The%20Overview%20and%20Scrutiny%20Committee%20is%20attended%20by%20review%20and%20monitor%20the%20effectiveness%20of%20Council%20s%20services>.

2. Scrutiny Inquiries in 2024 - 2025

- 2.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met throughout 2024-2025 to review Council policies and services across the range of Council departments. These included reviewing the performance and outcomes of Council services to provide accountability, as well as contributing to Council policy and service development.



*Councillor Isabel Creed –
Chairman of the Overview and
Scrutiny Committee 2024-2025*

- 2.2. The following short scrutiny inquiries were undertaken in 2024 - 2025:

- Proposed Cherwell Local Plan to 2042.
- New Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030.
- Housing Allocations Scheme Review.
- Everybody's Wellbeing Strategy Impact Assessment.
- Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership.
- Cost of Living 2023/2024 Review and Activities for 2024/2025.
- The Council's Annual Safeguarding Report.
- Resettlement and Migration
- The Council's new Transformation Programme
- Review of the Sale of Bodicote House
- New Council Offices at Castle Quay
- The council's end of year performance position for the financial year 2023-2024.
- Council performance throughout 2024-2025 – quarterly performance reviews.
- Annual Delivery Plan and Performance Outcomes Framework for 2025-2026.

- 2.3. The Committee also undertook in-depth scrutiny inquiries on *Equalities and Diversity, Food Insecurity, Climate Action* and *Planning Application Appeals*. These scrutiny inquiries were undertaken through Scrutiny Working Groups established by the Committee to carry out scrutiny inquiries on particular matters and report back. The Scrutiny Working Groups in 2024-2025 are discussed in more detail in Chapter 4.

Housing Allocations Scheme

- 2.4. On 10th September 2024 the Committee considered the New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme, reviewing proposed changes to the scheme, which was out for public consultation.
- 2.5. The main changes proposed in the new Scheme were:
- An increase in the banding for statutory homeless house holds.

- The creation of a domestic abuse category within Band 2 to comply with the Domestic Abuse Act 2021.
- Income threshold being capped at £80,000 for applications on larger properties.
- Changes to how overcrowded households are managed through the waiting lists.
- Additional preference for people leaving the armed forces and their families – consistent with the armed forces covenant within legislation.

- 2.6. The Committee recommended that the New Cherwell District Council Allocations Scheme be adopted by the Executive and that the Executive receive a summary of the public consultation for consideration alongside the Scheme being recommended for adoption.

Cost of Living

- 2.7. In September the Committee also considered the Cost of Living 2023/2024 Review and 2024/2025 related activities. The Committee reviewed the impact the councils' interventions has had on residents of the district and funding through HSF6 agreements with Oxfordshire County Council. The Committee recommended that the Executive endorse the scheme.

Performance

- 2.8. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee maintained oversight of Council performance throughout the year, considering quarterly performance reports against the Council's Key Performance Indicators across all Council service areas and with questions to the Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services and Council officers. It also considered the annual performance of the Council for all of the 2023-2024 year.



Councillor Chris Brant - Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, answering questions from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Performance for 2023 – 2024.

- 2.9. On 18th July 2024 the Committee considered a report from the Assistant Director – Customer Focus that detailed the council's performance position at the end of the financial year 2023-2024.
- 2.10. The Committee found that that 26 of the 27 Business Plan measures had been achieved. The one measure not achieved was "Net Additional Housing Completions to meet Cherwell Needs" with a final figure of 792 completions, which was 70% of the set target. said that this measure had been heavily affected by the national context, circumstances such as inflation, high building

costs, and high interest rates which resulted in the lower than expected number of completions.

- 2.11. The Committee considered how the Council's measured targets were set and if targets could be more challenging. Council officers advised that the Council use national targets and benchmark from previous years and took into consideration local context to set ambitious targets.
- 2.12. The Committee found that the number of housing completions target was missed by 30%, and that housing delivery had been good in respect of the requirements of the Cherwell Local Plan 2015 with an average of 1281 homes built a year.
- 2.13. In 2023-2024, the number fell to 792 homes built however this was consistent with national figures linked to issues with house building across the country. The Committee found that that there 6000 homes had been granted planning permission within the district but had not yet been built.

Quarter 1 Performance

- 2.14. On 10th September 2024 the Committee reviewed the council's performance position at the end of Quarter 1 2024-2025.
- 2.15. The Committee found that 50 of the 57 Business Plan measures had been achieved, 6 were operating slightly behind target and 1 being behind target. The one measure that was operating behind target related to temporary accommodation where 68 households were reported in temporary accommodation against the maximum target of 45.
- 2.16. With regards affordable housing, the Committee found that the overall housing target and qualifying target for affordable housing would be reviewed as part of the Local Plan process and would have regard to the Council motion to target 50%. It was important to balance the target with what was viable to ensure housing delivery occurred.
- 2.17. In response to a question regarding the percentage of Major Applications overturned at appeal and the cost to the council, the Assistant Director Planning and Development advised that the national target of 10% was the indicator whilst the actual for quarter 1 was 18.8%. The council was also measured nationally over a two-year period and this figure was 11.2%. The Committee found that the number of appeals this year had been higher than previous years resulting in more appeals being allowed. The cost of appeals varied greatly and were subject to various factors.

- 2.18. In response to a request that the red and amber indicators on the EDI Action Plan action plan be considered at the first meeting of the EDI working group, Committee endorsed the request.

Quarter 2 Performance

- 2.19. On 26th November 2024 the Committee reviewed the council's performance position at the end of Quarter 2. The Committee found that of the 17 business plan measures with set targets, 14 were either achieved or within the agreed tolerance, one was slightly behind target, and two behind target. The two measures that were operating behind target related temporary accommodation, where 77 households were reported in temporary accommodation against the maximum target of 45. It also found that the net additional housing completions to meet Cherwell needs where 307 housing completions (provisional) were reported against a target of at least 571 for the first half of the year.
- 2.20. In response to a question asking for more detailed figures in the rise of people in temporary accommodation and the support provided to single people with complex needs facing evictions from home office accommodation the Committee found that residents who have not intentionally made themselves homeless are eligible to apply for emergency temporary accommodation and that the process was designed to aid those with complex needs.
- 2.21. In relation to a question on unmet housing needs, noting the position of 307 provisional housing completions against the target of at least 571 for the first half of 2024. The Committee found that the Council's position reflects national trends in unmet housing needs. The Committee noted this as a concern, due to many complex site specific challenges related to infrastructure and the housing needs of neighbouring authorities.

Quarter 3 Performance

- 2.22. On 28 January 2025 the Committee reviewed Performance for Quarter 3. The Committee found that out of the 55 measures the Council, 44 were on track, 8 measures were slightly behind target and 3 measures were behind target. Of the 16 business plan measures 12 were not met, or achieved within the agreed tolerance, 2 were slightly behind and 2 were behind target. The two behind target were:
- Number of homeless households in temporary accommodation, with 77 households in temporary accommodation against the target of 45 and reflects national statistics.
 - Number of affordable homes delivered, with 38 affordable homes delivered against the target of 50 for Quarter 3, this was reflected against the annual target, which was reported ahead, with 192 homes delivered against the target of 150.

- 2.23. Of the 15 annual delivery plan milestones, the Committee found that 12 were achieved and 3 were slightly behind schedule. All priorities except one were on track for delivery by year end. Of the 24 EDI action plan activities, 3 were slightly delayed.
- 2.24. The Committee found that the number of households in Temporary Accommodation was the same as the previous quarter and queried if this meant that as one household moved into permanent accommodation another household took their place and sought clarity on how much temporary accommodation the council had.
- 2.25. The Committee considered the cost of temporary accommodation to the council and impact on the overall Council budget, and the Committee found that that spend for the last financial year was £634,000. The Council had thus far been able to operate within existing budgets in delivering that temporary accommodation. There was a base budget provided for that provision but there were also government grants that the Council received annually that had been unspent in previous years creating financial reserves.
- 2.26. The Committee recommended that the Executive consider writing to social housing providers in the district to enquire how the providers are spending government grants to improve their stock in relation to the energy efficiency of housing in Cherwell with particular reference to the eradication of damp and mould.

Housing Strategy 2025 – 2030

- 2.27. On 15th October 2024 the Committee reviewed the New [Cherwell District Council Housing Strategy 2025-2030](#) ahead of submission to Executive for adoption. A review of the current strategy and development of a new strategy was required to reflect changing national and local context over recent years and develop new priorities and objectives to be delivered. The Executive had agreed a public and stakeholder consultation commence on the draft revised Strategy at their 9 September 2024 meeting.
- 2.28. The Committee considered the consultation process, National Policy Framework (NPPF) and local policy context, as well as the scope of the policy, the existing housing stock, types of development and the social and physical infrastructure and resulting environmental impact.
- 2.29. The Committee found that the new Housing Strategy had been formulated in conjunction with the NPPF and the emerging Local Plan, but the full impact was unknown as consultation was ongoing.

- 2.30. The Committee found that according to the latest council tax data, approximately 1700 properties within Cherwell were vacant and that there were enforcement policies within the Housing Strategy to help tackle vacant properties. Stipulations on types of new developments were included in the emerging Cherwell Local Plan as well as the Oxfordshire Homelessness and Rough Sleeper policy and that schemes to aid in affordability were available for first time buyers.
- 2.31. The Committee considered what targets, metrics and measures of success were in place to monitor and deliver the Housing Strategy and found that the measures for tracking progress were outlined within the strategy, that an action plan would be used to monitor the strategy alongside regular update reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 2.32. The Committee recommended that the development of the new Local Plan be aligned with the new Housing Strategy, once adopted and that a section be included in the Housing Strategy Action Plan to provide further details and emphasis on single people in insecure accommodation (e.g. “sofa surfing”) and that a summary of consultation responses received as part of the report to Executive and Executive be recommended to give those responses due consideration.

Proposed Cherwell Local Plan

- 2.33. On 12th November 2024 and 4th December 2024 the Committee reviewed the proposed Cherwell Local Plan to 2042. The Committee considered the timelines, key changes since 2023 and the key themes and policy areas, including housing need, requirement and supply and stipulations of affordable housing within proposed developments. The Committee also considered submissions of correspondence received and replies to prospective developers as evidence.



Councillor John Broad – in committee

- 2.34. The Committee considered key strategic themes: strategic options and considerations, timetable and governance, housing and economic needs assessments, climate change and sustainable development, infrastructure, and consultation and engagement.
- 2.35. In response to a question in relation to stipulations for the installation and retrofitting of solar energy panels on both domestic and industrial units with the goal of reducing energy costs, the Committee found that the sustainable construction standards proposed for net zero emissions in the plan should ensure that the resulting developments would be more energy efficient but

that the plan cannot *require* the use of Solar PV on developments. Through the standards proposed, however, the overarching goal of net zero emissions would be achieved through multiple technologies and innovations which may well include solar energy and if achieved would then result in lower energy costs involved in heating said developments.

2.36. The Committee considered the Sustainability Assessment and the designation of land for employment and industrial and found that the plan contained flexibility to allow various forms of employment and development to take place within designated sites.

2.37. The Committee considered the allocation and removal of green belt land adjacent to the Oxford Technology Park to allow for expansion of the site and requested a further review of land allocated. The Committee found that since the Local Plan 2015 the land in question had been allocated and subsequently built on and therefore had no need to remove it from the green belt. In preparation for the proposed Local Plan a full review of green belt land had been undertaken.

2.38. The Committee made the following observations:

- That if the Local Plan submission is rejected by the Planning Inspectorate this could present a serious risk to the Council's local planning process.
- The importance of evidence of engagement with neighbouring local authorities, (including Oxford City Council). It noted that planning officers had agreed to meet with Chesterton Parish Council on employment proposals along the A41 corridor.
- The importance of the robustness of the Local Housing Needs Assessment, particularly in regard to unmet housing needs of neighbouring local authorities.

2.39. The Committee also noted that lessons learnt from the process followed pre-consultation scrutiny of the proposed Draft Local Plan include that there should be a longer lead in time for pre-consultation scrutiny.

Cherwell Local Plan 2042

A vision for sustainable development

Consultation runs until 14 February 2025



- 2.40. The Committee recommended to the Executive that the Draft Local Plan include a reference to Health in Rural Areas (provision of health facilities partially in rural areas). The Committee also recommended to the Executive to agree that the land adjacent to Isis Avenue, Hambleside, Eden Way and boarding Middleton Stoney Road be designated a part of the Local Green Space Designation in Bicester West.
- 2.41. In addition, the Committee recommended that the Proposed Cherwell Local Plan 2042 be approved for the purpose of inviting representations under Regulations 19 and 20 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning) (England) Regulations.

Safeguarding Self-assessment 2024

- 2.42. In December 2024 the Committee also considered Safeguarding and the annual return Report on Safeguarding (Safeguarding Self-assessment 2024)
- 2.43. The Committee noted the work carried out year to date, highlighting key challenges and successes achieved as well as statistics on the internal "See it Report it" (SIRI) and the reporting of safeguarding concerns.

Resettlement and Migration

- 2.44. On 28th January 2025 the Committee considered Resettlement and Migration, including resettlement and migration schemes in Cherwell to assist asylum seekers and refugees. The Committee considered the definition of "legal" vs "illegal" migration routes, the financial, resource and social impacts of the scheme to the Council and wider community, as well as the impact on housing supply and the volume of Freedom of Information (FOI) requests issued.
- 2.45. The Committee considered the resource burden arising from Freedom of Information requests and whether there was a resource limit placed on dealing with this and found that there was a resource pressure from this on the department. There is a statutory limit on the number of hours a response takes before the council can place a charge for Freedom of Information Requests, but it was very rare to receive individual requests that exceeded this limit.
- 2.46. The Committee considered to what extent the schemes are compulsory and to what extent there was local choice and found that the Homes for Ukraine programme was based on sponsors and hosts within the district, so the Council had no control over the numbers of those people wishing to live in Cherwell. It was very much a local offer to a group of people who needed housing.

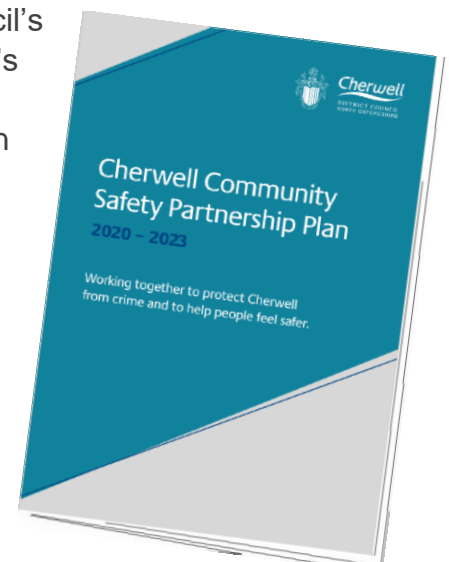
- 2.47. The Committee found that the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS) was an initial agreement to settle 18 families predominantly from Syria. This programme had significantly reduced over time. The Afghan families' schemes placed all people in properties that were formally Ministry of Défense (MOD) (so not social housing or private housing). Whilst the Council could refuse to support families and not get involved in the programs at all, there had been an expectation nationally that local authorities would play their part.
- 2.48. The Committee recommended that the Executive publish key information on resettlement and migration data that is frequently requested through Freedom of Information (FOI) requests, to help manage future FOI requests and that the Executive agree mandatory member training on resettlement, asylum and migration be included in the member development programme.

Sale of Bodicote House

- 2.49. On 28 January 2025 the Committee considered the sale of Bodicote House, the disposal of the property where the main council officers were situated, reviewing the process and progress of the proposed sale of Bodicote House. Specifically, the Committee reviewed the:
- key options considered
 - overall timeline – past and future projection
 - governance arrangements – including key dates for Executive Decision and sign off
 - financial and resources implications – inc costs and
 - value for money assessment – and criteria (including benchmarking)
 - risks and mitigations
 - asset management strategy and criteria
 - links to the move to Castle Quay – including the interrelated finance dimensions and risks.

Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership

- 2.50. On 11 March 2025 the Committee reviewed the [Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership](#). This was the Committee meeting as the Council's statutory Crime and Disorder Committee to fulfil the Council's statutory requirement for crime and disorder scrutiny;- to review or scrutinise decisions made, or other action taken, in connection with the discharge by the responsible authorities of their crime and disorder functions no less than once in every twelve-month period.
- 2.51. The Committee reviewed the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership as a whole, the [Cherwell Community Safety](#)



[Partnership Plan 2020 – 2023](#) and Priorities and how the Partnership works together to deliver this.

- 2.52. The Committee noted successes in securing a Home Office Safer Streets 4 bid from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) to tackle youth related violence and Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) in Banbury, introducing a Public Spaces Protection Order for Bicester town centre, securing funding to support a Young Women and Girls project, working with Thames Valley Police (TVP) colleagues to deliver objectives for an ASB focussed operation named OP JANKLE, as well as the Safeguarding Children in Banbury (SCiB) initiative.
- 2.53. The Committee also noted the proposed new CCSP 2025 – 2028 priorities:
- Anti-social behaviour (ASB)
 - Modern slavery and exploitation
 - Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
 - Domestic Abuse
 - Serious Violence
 - Retail Crime (including shop lifting)
 - Rough Sleeping.
- 2.54. The Committee also considered the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership (SOP), a thematic group in Oxfordshire that aims to bring together community safety partners to work together to deliver joint priorities and emerging themes, with a focus to make the county a safer place to live, work and visit by providing strategic oversight and direction for preventing crime and anti-social behaviour across Oxfordshire.
- 2.55. In response to a question regarding the lack of a CCSP plan for 2024 the Committee found that the change in the plans term and lack of a report were caused by the loss of staff as a result of the Councils split from Oxfordshire County Council.
- 2.56. The Committee also heard evidence from the Police and Crime Commissioner for the Thames Valley, Matthew Barber, Chief Constable Jason Hogg and Superintendent Benedict Clark, from Thames Valley Police.
- 2.57. The Police and Crime Commissioner advised the Committee on the review and restructure of the Thames Valley force, noting that it was the largest review and restructure since 2010, and that identified savings of £15.7m. £7m of these savings had been delivered to date. It was noted that the restructure was necessitated by the uplift in demand on policing in the area and that dedicated command units for specific areas were being rolled out across the district.

- 2.58. The Committee noted plans for increasing diversity and inclusion within the force, with measures being researched to encourage female applicants as well as applicants from diverse backgrounds.
- 2.59. The Committee noted the measures that had been undertaken to improve the response times on the nonemergency 101 police contact service. This included the introduction of new methods of contact such as social media channels, webchat functionality and an online victim portal as well as a new neighbourhood policing app.
- 2.60. The Committee found that the Thames Valley Alerts system had seen a boost in users to the sum of 107,000, and a rise of 57.37% interactions, which better enables the force to tackle local crime.
- 2.61. Superintendent Clark provided the Committee with more details on some of the operations currently taking place to reduce knife crime, anti-social behaviour, retail theft and rural crime in the Cherwell district. The Committee was advised that the emphasis was on prevention of such activities and often involved a highly targeted approach working with other agencies and partners.
- 2.62. The Committee recommended that the Executive, as a matter of urgency, ensure that the Cherwell Safer Community Partnership Plan be reviewed and updated and presented to this committee early in the next municipal year.



Councillor Lynne Parsons – in committee

New Council Offices at Castle Quay

- 2.63. On 11 March 2025 the Committee reviewed the plans for the New Council Offices at Castle Quay, including the process, progress and lessons learnt from the building of the new council offices within the Castle Quay estate in Banbury town centre. This scrutiny inquiry provided a check and assurance that the procedures have been followed, to achieve value for money and consider any reflections (lessons learnt).
- 2.64. In particular, the Committee reviewed:
- The current position and introductory summary of key events as to how the Council has arrived at the current position.
 - The overall timeline – from project inception and proposal to future projection
 - A summary of the tendering process.

- Negotiations, value engineering required time, resource and risk implications arising from this leading to contract sign off.
- Financial and resources implications – including costs and value for money assessment – and criteria (including benchmarking)
- Risks and mitigations
- Asset management strategy and criteria – how this links to and derives from the Council's Asset Management Strategy.
- Cross reference and links to the sale of Bodicote House – including interrelated finance dimensions and risks.
- Lessons learnt.

Transformation Programme

2.65. On 18 March 2025 the Committee reviewed the Cherwell District Council Transformation Programme, which included the development of the Transformation Programme, the next steps to developing a multi-year transformation programme, alignment with the Council's digital strategy and integration of other cross-cutting effectiveness strategies and programmes.

2.66. Specifically, the Committee reviewed:

- The development of the Cherwell District Council Transformation Programme, including the progress to date and next key steps.
- The next steps to developing a multi-year transformation programme.
- How the Cherwell District Council Transformation Programme aligns with the Council's digital strategy, and integration of the cross-cutting effectiveness strategies and programmes.
- The main impacts on front line Council service delivery and services to residents, including an areas of service reduction/rationalisation and any anticipated improvements.
- The anticipated financial implications including anticipated main costs and savings.
- Any significant Equalities Implications especially for particular groups or communities (cross referenced to Protected Characteristics).

2.67. The Committee also considered to what extent the recent English Devolution White Paper and Local Government Reorganisation and the proposed end of 'two tier' councils to be replaced by unitary councils, impacted on the Transformation Strategy, given that Cherwell District Council may shortly cease to exist. The Committee discussed to what extent has this likely possibility been built into the new Council Transformation Strategy.

Everybody's Wellbeing Strategy Impact Assessment

- 2.68. On 18 March 2025 the Committee reviewed Resettlement and Migration, which was a review to consider and reflect on the resettlement schemes in operation with Cherwell District Council, including the scope and history of these programmes, the resettlement work during the year highlighting successes and challenges.
- 2.69. The UK operates three resettlement schemes:
- the UK Resettlement Scheme (UKRS),
 - Community Sponsorship Scheme, and
 - Mandate Resettlement Scheme.
- 2.70. The Committee reviewed the resettlement schemes in operation with Cherwell District Council, the scope and history of these programmes, the resettlement work during the year highlighting successes and challenges and the financial and social impacts.

Annual Delivery Plan and Performance Outcomes Framework

- 2.71. On 18 March 2025 the Committee reviewed the council's draft Annual Delivery Plan and Performance measures for 2025/26, prior to the Executive finalising the annual delivery plan and associated measures.
- 2.72. In February full Council agreed to adopt a new vision for the council and four strategic priorities for achieving over the next five years, as part of its new Corporate Strategy. This overarching 5-year strategy is underpinned by Annual Delivery Plans for each year of the Corporate Plan period, which set out the strategic actions for delivering each year towards achieving the priorities establish in its Corporate Strategy.
- 2.73. The council's progress towards achieving its strategic priorities and measuring service delivery will be through a series of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) and the proposed list of KPIs for 2025/26 was reviewed by the Committee. The Committee reviewed the new key deliverables and major milestones. It was noted that these will be monitored and reported to this committee and Executive on a quarterly basis.
- 2.74. The Committee recommended that in relation to the development of quarterly milestones within the Annual Delivery Plan the following methodology and approach be adopted:

Quarter 1 –

Survey of tenants to analyse and establish a baseline for concerns and needs.

Quarter 2 -

Establish a monitoring framework based on the analysis of the above.

Quarter 3 -

Hold a registered providers forum.

Quarter 4 –

Further survey of tenants to inform actions for 2026/27.

- 2.75. The Committee also recommended to the Executive that the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) on Number of Homeless Households living in Temporary Accommodation retain the number of homeless households living in Temporary Accommodation and include an additional KPI metric on the number of people who are in nightly charged accommodation.

3. Scrutiny Working Groups in 2024-2025

- 3.1. Scrutiny Working Groups and informal working parties that are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider particular matters. They are made up of non-Executive Members of the Council appointed by the Committee.
- 3.2. In 2024-2025 the Overview and Scrutiny Committee established the following Scrutiny Working Groups:
- Equalities and Diversity Scrutiny Working Group
 - Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group
 - Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group.
 - Planning Application Appeals Scrutiny Working Group.

Equalities and Diversity

- 3.3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee re-established this Scrutiny Working Group and membership on 15 October 2024. This Scrutiny inquiry was established to review the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies, including, principally, the *Including Everyone* framework. This included reviewing the implementation of the Council's *Including Everyone* framework, reviewing the performance against the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives, reviewing the development of the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives for 2025-2026 and reviewing the arrangements for engagement and feedback with groups with 'protected characteristics' to help inform policy and approach.

Members of the Scrutiny Working Group

- 3.4. This Scrutiny Working Group was made up of members of the Personnel Committee and members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Members of the Scrutiny Working Group for 2024-2025 were:

Councillor Rebecca Biegel - Chairman
Councillor Gemma Coton – Vice Chairman
Councillor Barry Wood
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke.

- 3.5. This inquiry focused on equality diversity and inclusion policies and strategy and performance (i.e. relevant to the public sector equalities duties provided in the Equality Act 2010) and not broader community engagement issues.

- 3.6. The Council's *Including Everyone Framework* outlines the Council's approach to equalities, diversity and inclusion and sets out its vision to providing inclusive services, workplaces and communities, equitable access to services and equality of opportunity.



- 3.7. Cherwell District Council's Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion strategies are set out on the Council's website here:
<https://www.cherwell.gov.uk/info/5/your-council/1109/equalities-diversity-and-inclusion>
- 3.8. The goals and commitments of Cherwell District Council's *Including Everyone Framework* are set every four years. Sitting beneath this Framework are three annual action plans, that reflect the different ways in which Cherwell Council is working to make its organisation services and communities more inclusive.
- 3.9. The action plans have indicators to help measure progress against the goals. Implementation was overseen by the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion Member working group with reporting aligning with quarterly business plan monitoring.

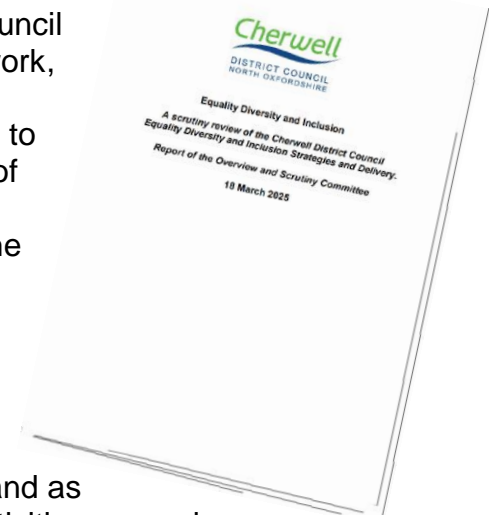
Witnesses to the Inquiry

- 3.10. The Scrutiny Working Group heard evidence from the following witnesses during 2024-2025:
- Councillor Chris Brant – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services (attending two of the meetings)
 - Nicola Riley, Assistant Director Wellbeing & Housing

- Claire Cox, Assistant Director Human Resources
- Shona Ware - Assistant Director of Customer Focus
- Celia Prado-Teeling - Performance Team Leader
- David Cruchley - Senior Youth Partnerships Manager, Oxfordshire Youth.

3.11. At the end of the scrutiny inquiry the Scrutiny Working Group put forward a draft report and ten recommendations to the Executive, which were adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 18th March 2025.

3.12. These included recommendations for That a refreshed Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and framework, EDI audits of public facing council services, a review of all policies plans and projects to make sure that they have up to date Equality Impact Assessment assessments, a review of the Council's recruitment process, an EDI audit of the Council's website and communications, and a refresh of the council's EDI objectives and KPIs to make sure they are focused and measurable.



Climate Action

3.13. Cherwell Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and as part of this committed to ensure its own operations and activities are carbon Net Zero by 2030 to do its part to support the district as a whole to become Net Zero. To achieve this, the Council has published a Climate Action Framework and an associated Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024.

3.14. The Climate Action Scrutiny inquiry was established by the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee for a further year in 2024-2025, to review the implementation and development of the Council's Climate Action strategy and action plan in pursuit of the corporate Net Zero targets. This included reducing the District Council's own greenhouse gas emissions, as well as reducing the area of the district's greenhouse gas emissions as a whole.

Members of the Scrutiny Working Group

3.15. The Members of the Scrutiny Working Group were:

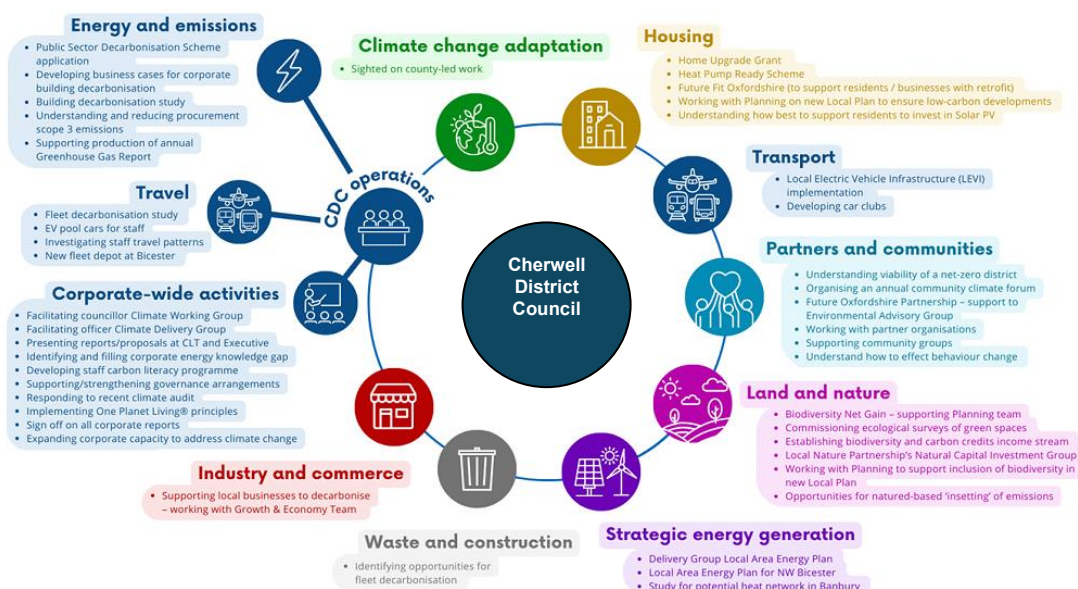
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray – Chairman
 Councillor John Broad - Vice-Chairman
 Councillor Barry Wood
 Councillor Isabel Creed
 Councillor Les Sibley.

Witnesses to the Inquiry

3.16. The Scrutiny Working Group considered evidence from the Executive Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities, Councillor Tom Becket and the Council's lead officers for Climate Change; Jo Miskin - Climate Action Manager,

Environmental Services and Hitesh Mahawar - Climate Change Programme Manager, as well as expert witnesses during its inquiry.

- 3.17. It also received evidence from Mona Walsh Assistant Director of Property and Christina Cherry - Planning Policy, Conservation & Design Manager at Cherwell Council.
- 3.18. The Working Group also received evidence from external expert witnesses Dr Marco Raugei - Senior Lecturer and Senior Research Fellow in Mechanical Engineering, Oxford Brooks University and Andy Wainwright MSc CEng FIET - Whole System Manager, Scottish and Southern Electricity Networks.
- 3.19. In evidence the Scrutiny Working Group considered the context to the Climate Change Programme and key elements to the Climate strategy in Cherwell, including:
- Governance arrangements
 - Strategy and Action Plan
 - Cherwell Council and district emissions
 - Recent achievements
 - Challenges in reaching Net Zero
 - Next steps.
- 3.20. The Working Group has considered the climate impact of local plans and how they contribute to the Climate Action Plan, as well as the solar strategy for the district. Officers from the planning department discussed the climate impact of planning applications.



- 3.21. Cherwell Council's approach requires new relationships with its stakeholders, new expectations and engagement with its supply chain, and a review of where it is best placed to support others to take action.

- 3.22. The Council reports against its climate action framework in order to inform future corporate planning in the Council. The Council also reports on its carbon emissions over time to help monitor, evaluate, review and communicate progress.
- 3.23. The Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group met throughout the 2022-2024 municipal years and reviewed progress on climate action as well as supporting the development of the Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024. On 15 October 2024, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed that this Scrutiny Working Group continue its work through the 2024-2025 municipal year. At the completion of its work for 2024-25, the Scrutiny Working Group agreed on eight recommendations to the Council's Executive, made through the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.24. These included recommendations for a new Council Climate Action Strategy, an evaluation of interim options to replace the Council fleet of vehicles, and hypothecated investment in Cherwell Council district corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

Food Insecurity

- 3.25. The Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group was originally established in 2022 and continued through 2023-24 and 2024-25. The Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group was set up to provide oversight and assurance and facilitate contributions from elected members, to review the progress of the implementation of the Cherwell Food Action Plan and make recommendations and suggestions for consideration by the Executive Portfolio Holder and the Wellbeing and Housing Services department.
- 3.26. The Scrutiny Working Group was originally established following the adoption of a Council motion which declared a food poverty emergency commitment to the following actions:
- Designating a Food Champion
 - Reporting to Overview and Scrutiny on the scale of the food poverty crisis in Cherwell
 - Drawing up a Cherwell Food Action Plan to support local communities
 - Developing a promotional campaign relating to underclaimed Healthy Start Food vouchers
 - Supporting local communities to reduce food waste.
- 3.27. Prior to the food poverty emergency being declared, in June 2022 the Executive had endorsed and committed to the Oxfordshire Food Strategy. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy sets out a vision where everyone in Oxfordshire can enjoy the healthy and sustainable food they need every day.



- 3.28. A critical part of implementing the Oxfordshire Food Strategy has been the development of local Food Action Plans for each district, to ensure that the Food Strategy reflects local priorities and reflects the unique nature of the City and each of the Districts.
- 3.29. The Cherwell Food Action Plan identifies actions spanning 2024 – 2027. The Scrutiny Working Group reviewed progress against targets and metrics and helped to refine actions, providing oversight and assurance and also providing contributions from the Working Group through the review of the implementation of the Cherwell Food Action Plan.
- 3.30. The Scrutiny Working Group's assessment of the Cherwell Food Action Plan, focused on the key priority areas. At each meeting, actions within the identified priority areas were reviewed, with a particular emphasis on tackling food poverty and diet-related ill health, as well as building vibrant food communities.

Members of the Scrutiny Working Group

- 3.31. The following Members were appointed by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for the 2024-2025 municipal year:

Councillor Rebecca Biegel - Chair
 Councillor Phil Chapman – Vice Chair
 Councillor Dr Isabel Creed
 Councillor Gordon Blakeway
 Councillor Andrew Crichton
 Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke.

Witnesses to the Inquiry

- 3.32. The Scrutiny Working Group has spoken with both internal and external expert witnesses during its inquiry, including Councillor Rob Pattenden - Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities, Councillor Ian Middleton – Executive Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services, who is also the Council's appointed "Food Champion, they have been involved with the Scrutiny Working Group throughout 2024-2025.



Members of the Scrutiny Working Group visit the Banbury Larder

- 3.33. During the inquiry members of the committee have visited the [Banbury Larder](#) and seen first-hand the work going on there to support the community.
- 3.34. The Scrutiny Working Group has also worked with Departmental Officers Nicola Riley, Assistant Director of Wellbeing and Housing Services, Edward Frape, Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer and Libby Knox, Food and Wellbeing Officer, who have provided support, briefing reports and answered questions at each meeting.

- 3.35. The Scrutiny Working Group also received oral evidence from expert witness Alison Drake from the [Bicester Foodbank](#).

Planning Application Appeals

- 3.36. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee established a Planning Application Appeals Scrutiny Working Group made up of all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.37. Members of the Committee met on 25 February 2025 to consider an overview of planning application appeals performance, having particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal (Planning Committee and delegated decisions), the reasons for cost implications and lessons learnt.
- 3.38. This allowed members to examine the evidence and put questions to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway - Portfolio Holder, and the council's lead planning officers.
- 3.39. The Head of Development Management provided a presentation on Cherwell District Councils planning application appeals, with particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal, the reasons for cost implications and lessons learned.
- 3.40. Members heard that the Council had performed well in the speed of decision making for both major and non-major applications. It had also performed well on the quality of decision making for non-major applications. The Council had, however, underperformed on the quality of decision making for major applications. This was as a result of a high number of major appeals being allowed (12) against the total number of major application decisions made in the assessment period (114). This resulted in a figure of 10.53% of appeals allowed, which was over the 10% threshold set by the government.
- 3.41. Members heard that, as a result of this underperformance the Council could be at risk of being 'Designated as underperforming' and if designated, the Council might lose the ability to determine some applications and also lose the associated planning fee. In addition, members were advised that defending Cherwell District Council's the high number of appeals, came at a cost to the Council, as such there were financial implications if the appeal performance was not improved.
- 3.42. Members put questions covering various topics such as the applications process, performance, speed of applications, and costs implicated, as well as applications overturned against officer recommendation. Members agreed five recommendations to the Executive under the following key themes.
- Lessons Learnt
 - Member Training
 - Action Plan

- Monitoring Improvement

4. Scrutiny Resources and Member Development

4.1. Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee were invited to attend *An introduction to effective scrutiny a development and training event* on Thursday 12 December 2024 run by the Local Government Association.

4.2. In addition to Leadership Advisors from the LGA, the event included insights from practice from Councillor Jackie Taylor – Cabinet Member for Adult Services, Health and Wellbeing, Sandwell Metropolitan Borough Council.

4.3. More information and resources on Overview and Scrutiny at Cherwell District Council is available via the Council's website:

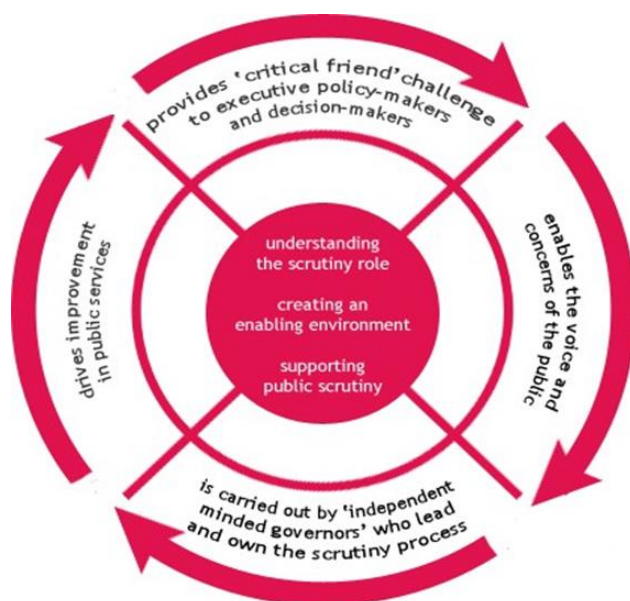
<https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=116>

4.4. The [Cherwell District Council Scrutiny Guide](#), which sets out key aspects of how Overview and Scrutiny works at Cherwell Council is available here:

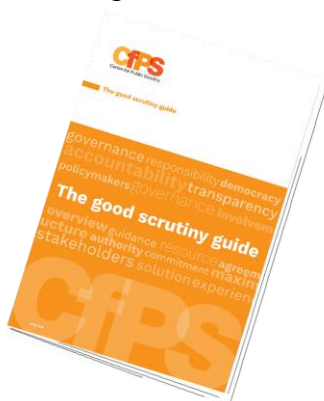
<https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s58559/Scrutiny%20Guide%202024.pdf>

4.5. The [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance](#) published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is available here: [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance 2024](#).

4.6. [The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) also publish a wealth of information on Overview and Scrutiny, including the [Good Scrutiny Guide](#).



Cherwell Council
Scrutiny Guide



CfGS Good Scrutiny
Guide



Statutory Scrutiny
Guidance 2024

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee is appointed by Cherwell District Council to carry out the local authority scrutiny functions.

Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Chairman)
Councillor Nigel Simpson (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Gordon Blakeway
Councillor John Broad
Councillor Phil Chapman
Councillor Grace Conway-Murray
Councillor Andrew Crichton
Councillor Frank Ideh
Councillor Harry Knight
Councillor Simon Lytton
Councillor Lynne Parsons
Councillor Barry Wood

Formal Minutes

Minutes of proceedings are available to view or download from the Council website at <https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/mgCommitteeDetails.aspx?ID=116>

Committee Staff

The current staff of the committee are:
Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
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Cherwell District Council

March 2025

www.cherwell.gov.uk



Cherwell District Council

Overview and Scrutiny Guidance

May 2025

This document is designed to be used as a reference guide alongside the detailed section of the Constitution Part 4a.

It builds upon the Cherwell Council Scrutiny Guide February 2025.

Agreed by the Council on 21 May 2025.

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1. Introduction

What is Overview and Scrutiny?

- 1.1. Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of local authority decision making governance arrangements. It was introduced by the Local Government Act 2000 which created separate Executive and Overview and Scrutiny functions within local authorities, with an Executive making executive Key Decisions, Overview and Scrutiny Committees to provide a check and accountability and provide an opportunity for non-Executive Members to make reports and recommendations to the Executive and a full Council that sets the overall policy and budgetary framework.
- 1.2. Councils operating executive decision making arrangements are required to create one or more Overview and Scrutiny Committees made up of councillors who are not members of the Executive,
- 1.3. Cherwell District Council operates an Executive/Cabinet and scrutiny decision making model, which is broadly, conceptually, based on the Westminster Parliamentary model, which has a government Cabinet executive and parliamentary select committees.
- 1.4. The purpose of Overview and Scrutiny is to ensure that decision-making in local government is transparent, accountable and provides an opportunity for non-executive Members of the Council to contribute to policy making and review. The scrutiny process should help to ensure that all decisions are taken in the interests of the residents of Cherwell.
- 1.5. Scrutiny committees are led by elected Members of the Council, which provides them with a particular democratic mandate and legitimacy.
- 1.6. Scrutiny committees are independent and hold the Executive to account by acting as a “critical friend”, as well as providing a vehicle for the wider membership of the Council to contribute to policy development and review.
- 1.7. Overview and Scrutiny committees have the power to consider any issue which “affects the area or the area’s inhabitants” and to examine cross-cutting issues and context to local decision making, including local partnerships and community wellbeing.
- 1.8. Overview and Scrutiny committees may:
 - require information that is held by the Council (with councillors sitting on overview and scrutiny committees having particular rights to access certain information - for example, information that might be commercially confidential),
 - require attendance at committee meetings by Executive members and Council officers,
 - require from the Executive responses to recommendations made by scrutiny committees.

What are the aims of scrutiny?

- 1.9. At Cherwell District Council the aims of scrutiny are:
- *To contribute to ongoing service improvement*
 - *To hold the Executive to account on behalf of local residents*
 - *To contribute to policy development and review through scrutiny reports and recommendations to the Executive.*
- 1.10. Scrutiny meets these aims by carrying out independent scrutiny inquiries and reviews of Council and community policies and services. These are carried out either as a full Committee or by a small group of Members in a time-limited scrutiny working group.

What are the benefits of scrutiny?

- 1.11. Overview and Scrutiny should help to drive improvement and accountability in local government through the democratic and governance process. It can also help to build a more inclusive decision making process by involving non-executive members, as well as community partner organisations and local people.

How does scrutiny work at Cherwell?

- 1.12. Every local authority is required to put in place arrangements for Overview and Scrutiny; however the particular arrangements for this is for the individual authority to decide. In Cherwell, scrutiny undertakes the majority of its scrutiny inquiries through the main Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but also via a combination of scrutiny working groups and spotlight reviews.
- 1.13. Cherwell Council has one Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC), established by the Council, to carry out the Overview and Scrutiny function.
- 1.14. The OSC is politically proportionate and meets roughly six times a year. The Committee may consider any policy issue across the range of Council services or which affect the wellbeing of the local community. This includes services provided by, or on behalf of the Council; or by external agencies. Scrutiny can consider the impact of Council policies and decisions and outcomes for residents.
- 1.15. It may consider issues before the Executive makes a decision (“pre-decision scrutiny”) and also has the power to Call In any Executive Decision made by the Executive or delegated to an officer, for review.
- 1.16. Regulatory decisions, i.e. those relating to planning or licensing applications, are not within the remit of OSC.
- 1.17. Section 5 of the OSC Constitution provides more detail on the specific functions of Committee.

2. Advice and Support to Scrutiny Committees

- 2.1. Scrutiny committees also receive professional advice from council chief officers and directorates according to their purview. In particular scrutiny committees may draw upon the advice and support of the Council's statutory officers, including the Monitoring Officer, Chief Finance Officer and Chief Executive.
- 2.2. In addition, Overview and Scrutiny committees receive advice and administrative support from the Democracy and Elections Team.
- 2.3. Scrutiny committees may also be allocated with support from one or more Scrutiny Officers, to provide specialist advice and support on the scrutiny process and provide practical support in drafting scrutiny reports and recommendations, preparing briefings, drafting report requests and acting as an interlocutor between scrutiny committees, the Executive and council departments.

The Monitoring Officer

- 2.4. The Monitoring Officer is the statutory officer responsible for the legal governance of a local authority. As such, this includes providing advice and support on the Council's Constitution, governance and decision making arrangements and relationships, including Overview and Scrutiny.

Scrutiny Officers

- 2.5. Scrutiny officers provide professional impartial advice and support to members of the scrutiny committees leading up to a scrutiny meeting, during the meeting itself and subsequently. They can advise on the scrutiny process, as well as support with analysis and desk research on items being considered by scrutiny and assist in developing questions to witnesses, scrutiny reports and scrutiny recommendations for agreement by the committee.

Democratic Services Officers

- 2.6. The scrutiny committees may also be allocated committee support from the Democracy and Elections Team. Democratic Service Officers provide specialist committee advice and support on committee procedures and provide the committee administration, including agenda preparation, agenda and reports publication, drafting and publishing committee minutes and following up on matters arising from committee meetings. Democratic Service Officers work closely with scrutiny officers to ensure the smooth running of the committee and scrutiny processes.

Departmental Officers

- 2.7. Senior Council officers for each department provide expert advice and support on Council services within their purview, this includes advice and support to Overview

and Scrutiny Committees when scrutiny committees are considering matters within their departmental and service area.

- 2.8. Council departmental officers provide advice and information on issues being considered by Scrutiny to ensure that Scrutiny Members have access to the information and expert advice they need to understand issues they are considering. In the scrutiny process they are key “expert witnesses”, being responsible for the delivery of Council policy and services and also being experts in their respective areas.
- 2.9. Council departments provide information reports to scrutiny committees and other information requested, for matters being considered by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Working Groups. In addition to information requests made ahead of or during a committee, senior officers should review the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme to anticipate reports requested to be provided to scrutiny committees and the deadlines for reports.
- 2.10. Because Council officers also advise and support the Executive and because senior officers also manage services and make decisions (including Key Decisions where delegated to them), their role is also part of supporting Executive accountability by answering questions in committee, along with the Executive.

3. Appointing the Chairman and Vice-Chairman

- 3.1. A special meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be scheduled as soon as possible after the Annual Council Meeting, when committee appointments have been approved, to allow the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider any proposals for the appointment of Chairman and Vice Chairman from among its members. Any member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may stand to be elected for these positions and any member may propose (and second a proposal) for any other member for to make their case for being appointment as Chairman and Vice Chairman, so long as those persons accept the nomination.
- 3.2. Prior to the meeting, those wishing to stand for Chairman Vice Chairman will have an opportunity address fellow committee members, explaining their reasons for being considered for the role(s). This is also an opportunity for any member wishing to propose another member of the Committee to explain their reasons for the proposal. The expectation is that an informal session will take place shortly before the formal Committee meeting to facilitate discussions between members who wish to be considered for the role of Chairman and Vice Chairman.
- 3.3. The Chairman of OSC has a responsibility for establishing the profile of the committee, its influence across the council and its ways of working, as well as ensuring that the scrutiny process is managed in a fair and balanced environment, is free from political point scoring and allows for effective scrutiny of all issues presented for consideration. Members putting themselves forward for the role may wish to use these points as guidance for the basis of their discussions with the committee.

- 3.4. Committee members will have the opportunity to ask questions of the prospective chairs and vice-chairs before the formal meeting.
- 3.5. The appointment of Chairman will normally take place at the first formal meeting of the Committee in the usual way.
- 3.6. The Monitoring Officer or his representative will call for nominations to the position of Chairman of the Committee, with seconders as appropriate. Voting will take place for each nominated candidate, via a show of hands, in line with section 4, paragraph 4.26 of the Constitution, with steps repeated as necessary until one candidate is successful.
- 3.7. The newly appointed Chairman will then take the Chair, and preside over the appointment of the Vice Chairman, which will follow the same process. Once the Vice Chairman has been appointed, the meeting will be brought to a close.
- 3.8. *Note – those wishing to stand as Chairman/Vice Chairman will be expected to attend in person.*

4. Work Planning

- 4.1. Scrutiny committees should plan their work carefully throughout the year to ensure that the scrutiny process can be effective. At Cherwell Council this includes development of an Annual Scrutiny Work Programme of issues that will be considered throughout the year through its main committee and through commissioned scrutiny working groups, as well as planning ahead of scrutiny committee meetings to plan out the objectives, key information required, key lines of enquiry and possible outcomes for each scrutiny topic.
- 4.2. There are normally six formal committee meetings scheduled throughout the year. In addition, OSC can appoint working groups to carry out detailed research and inquiries on behalf of the formal Committee (as detailed in Constitution section 4a)

The Annual Scrutiny Work Programme

- 4.3. Each year the scrutiny committees consider and agree a programme of work for the municipal year ahead, after considering what the key issues facing the Council and local community where consideration by a scrutiny committee might add value are. Usually, the work programme is for the municipal year period following the Annual Council Meeting, from June to May the following year.
- 4.4. Each year, in drawing up the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme, there is held an informal planning session, where members of the scrutiny committees may consider and discuss proposed topics for inclusion on the work programmes.
- 4.5. This informal session with members of the scrutiny committee allows for the committee to consider key background information and to consult the relevant

Council directorates and other stakeholders on the key issues for the Council and community partners that may usefully be considered by the scrutiny committees and to identify:

- the main topics for consideration throughout the year,
- the purpose and scope of each topic
- when each topic should be considered, and
- which departments, external agencies and expert witnesses should be called as witnesses to provide evidence.

- 4.6. The identified topics can then be developed into a work programme for the scrutiny committee that can be agreed by the next formal meeting of the committee, reported to full Council and used to plan the meetings of the committees throughout the year ahead.

Topic Selection and Prioritisation

- 4.7. Initial subjects for consideration will be requested from members of the Committee at a work programme planning session, with committee members given the opportunity to suggest subjects for inclusion on the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme.
- 4.8. Scrutiny members should consider key background information for the Council and the District to help prioritise and scope its Work Programme topics. This includes key strategic documents such as:
- Cherwell District Council Corporate Plan
 - the Annual Delivery Plan priorities,
 - Cherwell District Council Residents' Survey
 - Annual Corporate Performance reports
 - Budget Performance reports
 - The Executive Forward Plan.
- 4.9. An important document the Committee may wish to refer to during the planning session is the Executive Forward Plan (also known as the Executive work programme), the statutory document that is published on a monthly basis covering a rolling four-month period. More detailed information on the requirements of the Forward Plan can be found in section 6 of the Constitution, paragraph 6.1.
- 4.10. OSC may find it useful to refer to the latest version of the Forward Plan throughout the year, as well as during the work programme planning session, to consider upcoming items for the Executive and whether they would benefit from detailed discussion by OSC.
- 4.11. The OSC should prioritise possible issues carefully to ensure that only a manageable amount of issues are selected for consideration throughout the year; eg no more than twelve substantive issues and ensure that the issues selected are of significance to the Council and local residents and where consideration by the scrutiny committee can add value to the decision making process.

- 4.12. The OSC should be clear on the purpose of consideration by the scrutiny committee. Broadly there are two main rationales for scrutiny review, either:
- To provide accountability – eg performance reports and reviews,
 - Policy development and review – considering policy and service areas before a decision by the Executive – eg “pre-decision scrutiny”.
- 4.13. The proposed Work Programme needs to balance issues throughout the year and ensure that these are timely, appropriate and when scrutiny review can be effective, eg when a policy or service review reaches maturation, when information becomes available and ahead of when the Executive will make a decision on the issue (so that the Executive may receive recommendations from the OSC).
- 4.14. The OSC should review proposed issues for the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme to ensure that work of the Committee remains timely, adds value and does not duplicate activity already underway or undertaken by external regulators.
- 4.15. After the planning session, the Chairman and Vice Chairman will meet with officers from the Democratic and Elections Team to consider which subjects will be taken forward for the formal Annual Scrutiny Work Programme and what style of scrutiny (see the options below) would best suit each subject. The proposed Annual Scrutiny Work Programme will be presented to OSC at the next meeting for approval.
- 4.16. The OSC should review the Annual Scrutiny Work Programme throughout the year to ensure that work of the Committee remains timely, adds value and does not duplicate activity already underway or undertaken by external regulators. The working group scoping document ensures that the key questions that members want to address are listed.
- 4.17. The Chairman of the Committee will be responsible for allocating the Committee’s time to each work programme item, to ensure the best approach to each subject.

“Scrutiny members should accept that shortlisting can be difficult; scrutiny committees have finite resources and deciding how these are best allocated is tough. They should understand that if work programming is robust and effective there might well be issues that they want to look at that nonetheless are not selected.”

Statutory Scrutiny Guidance 2024

How do Committees choose what to scrutinise?

- 4.18. The OSC should ensure that it consults key stakeholders in developing its Annual Scrutiny Work Programme, particularly the main departments and chief officers of the Council and the Executive. Additionally, suggestions can be received from partner organisations or the public.
- 4.19. Effective scrutiny requires a balanced work programme, which examines the most important challenges facing the district and responds to the concerns of residents.

- 4.20. It is important to remember that scrutiny is an independent member-led process and it is ultimately the responsibility of the Chairman and the committee to determine what is scrutinised and when. This should, however, be based upon officer advice.
- 4.21. The *Criteria for selecting scrutiny topics* Guidance Note explains some of the key factors in determining whether an issue should be scrutinised.
- 4.22. Here are a few key points to remember when choosing subjects to scrutinise:
- It is not possible to scrutinise everything that might be suggested. Therefore, a rigorous approach should be taken to prioritising which topics are to be scrutinised.
 - thinking about the work of commissioned organisations and the monitoring other public bodies, and how scrutiny inquiries should involve and engage external witnesses and partner organisations
 - The Committees have to be realistic about what can effectively be scrutinised and needs to be prepared to say 'No' to some suggestions and be able to explain why they will not be scrutinised.
 - It is also important to consider what the best method to deal with any given scrutiny topic is. The choice may depend on the nature of the activity and the capacity of members and officers to conduct further topic groups within the suggested timeframe.
- ❖ If necessary, further items can be added to the work programme during the year, with additional meetings between the Chairman, Vice Chairman and officers being scheduled as necessary.

What methods are there to conducting scrutiny?

- 4.23. Overview and Scrutiny can use a range of different approaches depending on the issue being scrutinised. An important part of the work planning process is deciding on how a topic will be examined. Using the full range of methods open to it, scrutiny will be able to mix in-depth and searching inquiries with concise and effective reviews.
- 4.24. Here are some examples of different methods open to committee, some of which are discussed in more detail below:
- Whole committee scrutiny working groups
 - Scrutiny working groups with other non-executive Members of the Council
 - Single issue meetings ("Spotlight Reviews")
 - Calling witnesses or experts to provide specific information to members at committee
 - Site visits.

5. Scrutiny Pre-Meetings and Agenda Planning

- 5.1. There are normally six meetings of the OSC in each municipal year. Ahead of the main meeting, but after the formal agenda and reports have been published, an

informal meeting of the committee members may be held with the scrutiny officer to plan the key lines of enquiry, questions and possible outcomes for each item, which may include considering possible draft conclusions and recommendations from the committee.

Scrutiny Planning Meetings

- 5.2. Before the start of each formal meeting, an informal meeting of the committee may also be held to organise the key questions and possible outcomes for each item.
- 5.3. The agenda for the informal pre-meetings should include:
 - Introduction by the Chairman (setting out the purpose of the meeting)
 - Briefing on the Meeting Plan – including main agenda items, key witnesses for each item, proposed agenda timetable etc
 - Key Questions in Committee – prioritisation, rationalisation and allocation of questions for each agenda item.
 - Possible Outcomes – including key consultation and scrutiny recommendations. Key questions need to be included for these to ensure that they are evidence based.
- 5.4. These informal meetings can be important to making the scrutiny process effective, as they provide an opportunity for members of the committee to get organised in considering the key information they need to find out, organising their questions for the main meeting and considering possible outcomes from the meeting, such as proposed key conclusions and recommendations. Attendance and participation in these meetings is therefore highly encouraged.
- 5.5. There should be a clear rationale and agenda for the pre-meetings so that it is clear to members what the meetings are for. The meeting also provide an important opportunity for the Chairman and scrutiny officers to discuss the approaches, meeting plan and outcomes with the members of the committee.
- 5.6. These meetings should pay particular attention to the possible key conclusions, observations and recommendations to the Executive which may arise in the main meeting. It can be very challenging to develop appropriate conclusions and scrutiny recommendations in the formal meeting, so this is an important opportunity to consider how these might be framed and worded.
- 5.7. Scrutiny recommendations should be clearly addressed to the relevant decision maker (eg the Executive), and SMART (specific measurable, achievable, realistic and time based). They also need to be clearly linked to evidence received in the report and in questions, so links back to planning the key questions. This usually requires some consideration and forethought.

“Good preparation is a vital part of conducting effective evidence sessions. Members should have a clear idea of what the committee hopes to get out of each session and appreciate that success will depend on their ability to work together on the day.”

Statutory Scrutiny Guidance 2024

Scrutiny Briefing Plans

- 5.8. Ahead of each meeting, the scrutiny officer will normally provide a short briefing on the meeting, including the expected participants, the items being considered, along with any suggested considerations for the committee. The scrutiny officer will normally provide a specific briefing for the Chair of the committee to provide additional guidance on the main stages and directives from the chair.
- 5.9. The scrutiny officer may also provide advice on suggested key lines of enquiry and suggested questions to witnesses, which may be discussed in committee.

6. Options and Approaches for Scrutiny Reviews

Single item on a committee agenda

- 6.1. This may offer limited opportunity for effective scrutiny, but may be appropriate for some issues or where the committee wants to maintain a formal watching brief over a given issue.

At a single meeting - ‘Spotlight Review’

- 6.2. Either a formal committee meeting or an informal working group or briefing session. This could provide an opportunity to have a single public meeting about a given subject, or to have a meeting at which evidence is taken from a number of appropriate officers or subject matter experts.

A Scrutiny Working Group - ‘light touch’ review (eg two or three meetings)

- 6.3. A shorter scrutiny review may be most effective even for complex subjects. Properly planned and focused, they allow members to swiftly reach conclusions and make recommendations, over a short time period such as a couple of months.

A Scrutiny Working Group - longer-term - ‘full length’ review

- 6.4. Multiple meetings spread over a number of months. This is most appropriate when scrutiny needs to dig into a complex topic in significant detail. This may be suited to the most complex subjects, due to the length of time and wider resource implications for a long review.

7. Scrutiny Working Groups

- 7.1. Working groups involve a small number of councillors looking at an issue in greater detail, in some cases over a day. This process is more time consuming for councillors and officers than other scrutiny activities. Consequently, issues for topic groups are carefully prioritised. In order to make sure that the review is as effective as possible, it is vital that the scope of the review is well-defined.

- 7.2. For this reason each review starts with the completion of a scoping template (see *Scrutiny Working Group Inquiry Scoping Document template*) which outlines the key lines of enquiry,, outcomes and constraints, time- scale, key sources of information and principal witnesses.
- 7.3. At its meeting, the working group will hear from a range of witnesses and the lead officer. Depending on the topic, this may include expert witnesses and stakeholders, service users, managers and the relevant executive member/s.
- 7.4. Councillor questioning skills are a significant element of scrutiny and the quality of the questions is instrumental to achieving clear outcomes and strong recommendations.
- 7.5. A short report on the scrutiny inquiry undertaken, its findings, key witnesses and evidence considered and scrutiny recommendations (and the evidence to substantiate those recommendations) is referred to the OSC for ratification and agreement and then published.. The relevant Executive member is required to respond to the report and its recommendations within two months. Six months following the scrutiny, the OSC will monitor implementation of the recommendations.

8. 'Call In' of Executive Decisions

- 8.1. The Local Government Act 2000 allows Overview and Scrutiny Committees to Call In any Executive Key Decision for review (these are Key Decisions taken by the Executive or a key decision made by officers, but not yet implemented).
- 8.2. Unless it meets exemption criteria (detailed in paragraph 13.1 of Part 4a the Constitution), any Executive or officer Key Decision can be called in by noon within four working days of publication of a Key Decision made by the Executive or by an officer (Executive decisions will be published as soon as practicable after the Executive meeting). A key decision can be called in for scrutiny by five Non-Executive members specifying the reason or reasons for the proposed Call In review.
- 8.3. A meeting of OSC will be held within 10 working days. Implementation of the decisions will be delayed while OSC meets and considers the decision.
- 8.4. One of the councillors who submitted the Call In notice are expected to address the committee and, for Key Decisions made by Executive, the relevant Executive Member will respond on behalf of the Executive.
- 8.5. Having reviewed the decision, OSC can:
 - a) Let the decision stand (take no further action).
 - b) Refer the decision back to the Executive or officer (as the case may be) for re-consideration, stating its concerns and the decision that the Committee wish the decision taker to make.
 - c) Determine if the reviewed decision is contrary to the policy framework or to the budget; and in which case refer the matter to Full Council for consideration.Decisions referred for further consideration remain suspended until redetermined.

- 8.6. Call In should not be used on an issue that has previously been considered by OSC.
- 8.7. *Sections 13 to 17 of the OSC Constitution give more detailed information and guidance on the call-in process at Cherwell.*

9. Access to Information and Reports

- 9.1. A scrutiny committee needs access to relevant information the authority holds and to receive it in good time, if it is to do its job effectively. This need is recognised in law, with members of scrutiny committees enjoying powers to access information¹
- 9.2. Scrutiny committees normally access information through requesting officer reports to committee for items on the agenda and may also request information at a meeting of the committee.
- 9.3. Where the committee makes requests for information in committee, this is normally made available to all members of the committee thereafter. This should be done before or at the next meeting of the committee.

Report Requests

- 9.4. There is a general expectation that officers will provide a written report for items on a scrutiny committee agenda. There is a standard format for this, which should provide the main information pertinent to the matter under consideration. Scrutiny members should expect this standard report be made available to the committee and not simply a PowerPoint presentation slides.
- 9.5. The general expectation is that reports will be made available to a committee upon request with a reasonable notice period, sometimes at relatively short notice. However, scrutiny members should also be aware of the time it can take to prepare a formal report and also the Council's operational report clearance processes and make report request in good time to allow for this.
- 9.6. The report also needs to be available at least five "clear days" ahead of the meeting as a minimum to meet the statutory publication deadlines. Deadlines for reports should normally be provided with the report requests. The deadline for final reports will usually be at least ten days ahead of a meeting to allow time for compilation and publication within the statutory deadlines.

¹ Regulation 17 - Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012; article 10 Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Regulation 17 - Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012; article 10 Combined Authorities (Overview and Scrutiny Committees, Access to Information and Audit Committees) Order 2017.
↪ [The Local Authorities \(Executive Arrangements\) \(Meetings and Access to Information\) \(England\) Regulations 2012](#)

- 9.7. As far as practicable, five to six weeks before a meeting of the committee, a report request is submitted by the scrutiny officer to the relevant department, which provides a still brief but more detailed scope of the topic and the key information to be addressed in the report. This is normally drawn up by the scrutiny officer in consultation with the Chairman of the committee.
- 9.8. This should be used by the department to guide the preparation of any requested reports to the committee.
- 9.9. The report requests should include the subject for consideration, the purpose of the inquiry, the key lines of enquiry being addressed, the relevant Executive Member and directorate, any external witnesses anticipated and the deadline date for submission of any papers for publication with the agenda, (which must be at least 5 “clear days” before the meeting). Normally, a draft copy of the report will be requested for at a week before the final report deadline to allow the Chairperson of the scrutiny committee to review the draft report.

Scrutiny Agenda Publication

- 9.10. Scrutiny agendas and papers must be published five clear days in advance of the meeting and are published on the Council website.

10. Questions in Committee

- 10.1. Members of scrutiny committees will put questions to witnesses in committee, including to Executive Members, council officers and external witnesses. Putting the right questions in a scrutiny committee can be key to ensuring that the scrutiny process is effective in obtaining evidence in support of scrutiny recommendations and in providing focused accountability. Scrutiny Members need to be careful however that questions are focused and strategic towards the objectives of the scrutiny inquiry being undertaken.
- 10.2. Broadly, the purpose of questions in committee is either:
- To hold the executive to account,
 - To better understand the area under consideration,
 - To seek information to inform the development of any proposals (scrutiny recommendations) or conclusions drawn from the matter under consideration.
- 10.3. Questions from the committee may be put in committee without any advance notice and answered in committee.
- 10.4. Questions from members of the committee may be sent to the scrutiny officer or collated ahead of the meeting, and with the permission of the members of the committee, submitted to the department, may provide for a more considered or extensive answers in committee, but such questions are still to be put and answered at the meeting, along with any supplementary information made available in response.

11. Scrutiny Reports and Recommendations

- 11.1. The main statutory role of scrutiny committees is the power to make reports and recommendations to the Executive. Scrutiny recommendations may be made in committee to the Executive or other local decision makers. The Executive has a statutory duty to respond to scrutiny reports and recommendations made.
- 11.2. Scrutiny reports and recommendations may be drawn up in advance, with the advice and support of a scrutiny officer, sometimes through a Scrutiny Working Group. Scrutiny reports and recommendations are agreed by resolution of the committee in committee.
- 11.3. The resolutions of the committee should be put to the committee verbatim by the Chair (or through the clerk or scrutiny officer in assisting the Chair), or tabled in written form (such as on an officer report with officer recommendations). Such proposed resolutions may then be debated and amended before being resolved upon. Scrutiny recommendations may also include those made in scrutiny reports agreed in committee (e.g. through Scrutiny Working Groups).
- 11.4. Consideration should be given before and during the meeting as to how scrutiny recommendations should be worded so that they are worded in the most meaningful and effective way. The wording of scrutiny recommendations should be framed in such a way as to provide possible executive decisions if agreed by the Cabinet (or other decision maker).
- 11.5. As far as possible, scrutiny recommendations should be SSMART – Strategic, Specific, Measurable, Achievable and Time-based.
- 11.6. What is the best way to make sure our recommendations are implemented?
- 11.7. A scrutiny inquiry will conclude by making recommendations to decision-making bodies, such as the Council's Executive.
- 11.8. The following tips can help ensure that scrutiny recommendations are implemented:
 - Recommendations that are specific, strategic, substantive, achievable and few in number:
 - Recommendations based on logical argument drawing on evidence.
 - Ensure those responsible for implementing recommendations are asked about what the feasibility of proposed recommendations and can suggest modifications in evidence if that is going to make it more likely that the recommendation will be implemented.
 - Recommendations will be drawn up and presented clearly by the working group as part of its final report. Executive, via the appropriate Executive member, will provide a response to all recommendations explaining the reasons for accepting or not accepting any of the recommendations.
 - Implementation of recommendations should then be monitored.

12. The Executive Response

- 12.1. Once a scrutiny committee has resolved to make a report and/or recommendations to the Executive, the scrutiny report and/or recommendations are referred to the Executive (or other decision maker) for an Executive Response.
- 12.2. The Scrutiny Officer will prepare an officer cover report to the Executive or Executive Member (as appropriate) to present the scrutiny report or recommendations and once this is authorised for publication by the Monitoring Officer, will be placed upon the agenda of the Executive. This serves as the formal notice to the Executive of a scrutiny report or recommendations . This notice must require the Executive to respond within two months of receiving the report notice.
- 12.3. Where a scrutiny report or recommendations are referred to the Executive, at the relevant meeting of the Executive, the Chairman of the OSC relevant Scrutiny Working Group will be permitted, at the discretion of the Chairman of Executive (the Leader), to briefly address Executive to provide a brief oral summary report on the key findings and scrutiny reports and recommendations being made, requesting an Executive Response to any reports and recommendations made.
- 12.4. It is a statutory duty of the Executive to respond a scrutiny committee:
 - (a) to consider the report or recommendations,
 - (b) to respond to the scrutiny committee indicating what (if any) action the authority, or the executive, proposes to take,
 - (c) if the overview and scrutiny committee has published the report or recommendations, to publish the response.

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukpga/2000/22/section/9FE>

- 12.5. The Executive Response is made at a formal meeting of Executive (or other decision making body), by formal resolution.
- 12.6. The draft Executive Response should be drawn up in advance by the relevant department, in consultation with the relevant decision maker. The Executive Response should provide clear executive decisions for each scrutiny recommendation.
- 12.7. The Executive Response should be drafted in such a way as to provide clarity on whether the scrutiny recommendation is agreed or rejected, or if an alternative course will be agreed, the relevant portfolio holder (Executive member), the implementing department and when the agreed actions and decisions will be implemented.
- 12.8. The Executive must respond **within two months** beginning with the date on which it received the notice of the scrutiny report or recommendations.

13. Scrutiny Review of Implementation

13.1. *How are recommendations monitored?*

- 13.2. Six months after the OSC has made recommendations to the Executive, progress on the implementation of those recommendations should be reported to OSC. The format of the monitoring may differ from subject to subject, but may include:
- A table listing each recommendation with a 'progress' column
 - A written report from relevant Executive member/officer
 - A presentation
- 13.3. OSC should evaluate and assess the impact of their previous recommendations, referring back to the initial scoping document and compiling a brief evaluation summary for publication.

14. Scrutiny Co-optees

- 14.1. The constitution allows co-option of external people to assist with specific scrutiny reviews (section 4a, paragraph 6.9). Such co-options can be made to the formal OSC, however it is more likely that committee will want to appoint co-optees to task and finish scrutiny working groups that are established for specific reviews.
- 14.2. Once a scrutiny working group has decided to co-opt members, Expressions of Interest to join the working group may be sought from the desired background, included other non-executive Members of the Council, external organisations, experts in the field, service users.
- 14.3. In considering co-option of people outside of the Council and external organisations particular care should be given to consider appropriate persons, mindful of the fact that people and organisations may have particular political and personal interests in an issue. Elected Members and external cooptees need to bring an objective and independent mindset to the scrutiny process, along with their knowledge and expertise.
- 14.4. In seeking Expressions of Interest the following details need to be defined and communicated to people who may be interested, the following steps may be followed:
- the subject under review
 - an indicative timeframe for the whole review
 - an estimate as to the number of meetings that the co-optees will be expected to attend
 - the format and anticipated location of the meetings, i.e. online via MS Teams, in person at Council offices, or a hybrid approach
 - how interested parties should make their application, eg. via a CV and covering letter, email or application form
 - the deadline for applications/expressions of interest.

- 14.5. In identifying Expressions of Interest from external people and organisations, an advertisement of the co-option opportunity may be sent out to relevant agencies and advertised through Council media and other available media, providing the details of the role and scrutiny inquiry.
- 14.6. Members of the scrutiny working group may consider expressions of interest received, creating a short list for interview. Shortlisted candidates will be invited to attend a meeting, and the task and finish group will decide who to appoint.
- 14.7. The Scrutiny Working Group will reserve the right to not appoint any co-optees following interview.
- 14.8. Any appointments made will be for a specified time period, likely to coincide with the estimated timeframe for the scrutiny inquiry.
- 14.9. Once the recruitment process has completed, meetings of the scrutiny working group will take place in line with the process detailed at paragraph 6.6 of the Constitution.

15. Scrutiny Training and Development

- 15.1. The Statutory Scrutiny Guidance 2024 says that Local Authorities should ensure committee members are offered induction when they take up their role and ongoing training so they can carry out their responsibilities effectively and that authorities should pay attention to the need to ensure committee members are aware of their legal powers, and how to prepare for and ask relevant questions at scrutiny sessions.
- 15.2. Cherwell District Council draws up an annual programme of scrutiny training and development for members and officers, including training and development for new members of the a scrutiny committee, training and development for all members of the OSC and scrutiny working groups, scrutiny training for all members of the Council, including Members of the Executive, training for council officers involved with Overview and Scrutiny.

16. Further resources and reviewing and updating of this guide

- 16.1. The Monitoring Officer and Democratic and Elections Team will periodically review this guide with the Chairman and Vice Chairman, gathering feedback from OSC as required, to ensure it remains up-to-date and appropriate.
- 16.2. In addition to this guide and the formal CDC Constitution, OSC members may wish to consult further resources, such as the LGA's Councillor Workbook on Scrutiny - <https://www.local.gov.uk/publications/councillors-workbook-scrutiny> (updated September 2023) which gives more detailed information about possible approaches to Scrutiny.

- 16.3. *This guidance should be read in conjunction with the [Cherwell District Council Constitution](#)² and the [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance](#)³ issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.*

² The Cherwell District Council Constitution

<https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=531&MId=3982&Ver=4&Info=1>

(Accessed 11 February 2025).

³ Statutory guidance - Overview and scrutiny: statutory guidance for councils, combined authorities and combined county authorities, Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government
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