

# Public Document Pack



**Cherwell**

DISTRICT COUNCIL  
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

**Committee:** **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

**Date:** **Tuesday 27 January 2026**

**Time:** **6.30 pm**

**Venue:** **39 Castle Quay, Banbury, OX16 5FD**

## **Membership**

**Councillor David Rogers (Chair)**

Councillor Phil Chapman  
Councillor John Broad  
Councillor Frank Ideh  
Councillor Simon Lytton  
Councillor Dom Vaitkus

**Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Vice-Chair)**

Councillor Gordon Blakeway  
Councillor Gemma Coton  
Councillor Harry Knight  
Councillor Lynne Parsons  
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 - 10)

To confirm as a correct record the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 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. Performance Monitoring Report Quarter 3 2025 - 2026**

Report of Assistant Director of Finance.

##### **Purpose of report**

To report to the committee the council's performance position at the end of Quarter 3 2025-26.

##### **Recommendations**

The Overview and Scrutiny resolves:

- 1.1 To consider and note the contents of the council's performance Quarter 3 report.

\*\*\*Please note this report will be to follow\*\*\*

#### **7. Executive Response to the Overview & Scrutiny Recommendations (Pages 11 - 30)**

Report of the Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer

##### **Purpose of report**

To present the Executive Responses to four sets of recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the presentation of the scrutiny reports to the Executive on 7 October 2025.

##### **Recommendations**

That Overview and Scrutiny resolves:

- 1.1 To note the Executive Responses to the Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations, attached at Appendices 1 to 4.
- 1.2 To monitor progress/implementation of recommendations as necessary

**8. Cherwell Futures Programme (Pages 31 - 40)**

Report of the Executive Director, Resources

**Purpose of report**

To provide Overview & Scrutiny with a detailed update on the Council's Cherwell Futures Programme, focusing on governance improvements, standardisation, workforce development, and the agreement of priorities since the last report.

**Recommendations**

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To note the progress made on governance, standardisation, and workforce development.
- 1.2 To comment on the contents of this report and make any recommendations.

**9. Work Programme Update (Pages 41 - 44)**

An update on the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

**Recommendation**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To consider and agree the Scrutiny Work Programme update.

**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](mailto: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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## **Queries Regarding this Agenda**

Please contact Emma Faulkner / Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections  
[democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk](mailto:democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk), 01295 221534

## **Shiraz Sheikh Monitoring Officer**

Published on Monday 19 January 2026

# Agenda Item 3

## **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 16 December 2025 at 6.30 pm

Present:

Councillor David Rogers (Chair)

Councillor Gordon Blakeway

Councillor John Broad

Councillor Gemma Coton

Councillor Frank Ideh

Councillor Simon Lytton

Councillor Lynne Parsons

Councillor Dom Vaitkus

Apologies for absence:

Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Phil Chapman

Councillor Harry Knight

Also Present:

Councillor Robert Parkinson, Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities

Matthew Barber, Thames Valley Police and Crime Commissioner

Chief Constable Jason Hogg, Thames Valley Police

Chief Superintendent Ben Clarke, Thames Valley Police

Also Present Virtually:

Councillor Barry Wood

Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services

Councillor Julian Nedelcu

Councillor Alisa Russell

Councillor Les Sibley

Officers:

Gordon Stewart, Chief Executive

Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer

Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services

Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services & Community Safety

Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

Martyn Surfleet, Democratic and Elections Officer

40 **Declarations of Interest**

There were no declarations of interest.

41 **Minutes**

The Minutes of the meeting of the Committee held on 11 November 2025 were agreed as a correct record and signed by the Chair.

42 **Chairman's Announcements**

There were no Chair's announcements.

43 **Urgent Business**

There were no items of urgent business.

44 **Crime and Disorder Scrutiny - Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership and Thames Valley Police**

The Chair welcomed the Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, Matthew Barber, Chief Constable Jason Hogg and Superintendent Ben Clark, Thames Valley Police, to the meeting.

The committee considered a presentation from the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety on the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership (CCSP) detailing its duties and responsibilities. Members were informed of the make-up of the partnership and its six statutory partners as well as other permanent members.

The presentation also provided an overview of the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership (SOP), and the Strategic Needs Assessment of the CCSP.

Members were updated on the CCSP's for 2025-2026 that identified six priority areas;

- Antisocial behaviour
- Modern slavery and exploitation
- Violence against women and girls (VAWG)
- Serious violence
- Domestic abuse
- Retail crime

Members were also updated on activities and interventions of the CCSP and Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) within Cherwell and Oxfordshire as a whole detailing the multi-agency partnership working undertaken to tackle issues such as domestic abuse, antisocial behaviour, and safeguarding children.

The Police and Crime Commissioner began his presentation by referencing the recent Government announcement regarding the planned abolition of the Police and Crime Commissioner role, and assured members that work would continue for the remainder of the term of office.

Members were advised that police staffing numbers had increased significantly due to a successful and ongoing recruitment drive, with a focus on neighbourhood policing having trebled officer numbers over a 3 year period.

Members were advised that increased funding for services was being sought to bolster and maintain this growth in employment of police officers. As government funding was directed to recruiting police officers, pressures still remained with regards to other back of house and front line staff such as call handlers and Police Community Support Officers (PCSOs).

Members were advised of the work to reduce call wait times for non-emergency calls to 101 as part of the Crime Fighters Strategy, taking an average of 7-8 Minutes to answer calls to a new average of 1 minute<sup>53</sup> seconds within the previous 6 months, and as of November being reported as low as 46 seconds.

Members attention was drawn to the new introduction of a new A.I. chat bot “Bobbi” launched on the UK Police website with the aim to provide advice and support to the public for non-emergency police inquiries. And that this was part of a wider initiative regarding digital reporting of incidents such as anti-social behaviour that may fall between organisations, with the aim to improve and streamline public engagement with both the Police and Councils through a dedicated case management software.

In response to a question regarding the enforcement of speed restrictions within the County, and the increase in fixed camera offences contrasted by the reduction in mobile enforcement actions leading to the potential for reduced enforcement overall, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained that the enforcement of speed restrictions was an operational matter for the Police, and that enforcement took a multiple approach strategy that incorporated a variety of enforcement activities across the police service.

In response to a question regarding rural crime and the theft of GPS units on farm equipment and whether any progress had been made in reducing incidents, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained that legislative changes were needed for the enforcement of such crimes, and that the Equipment Theft (Prevention) Act 2023 had been introduced to tackle the issue, but broader measures were being sought to strengthen enforcement powers.

The Chief Constable gave a presentation which provided more details on neighbourhood policing, focusing on workforce statistics, stating that the Thames Valley Police were fully staffed but were still behind on officers per population figures, and that this was a national trend. Members were also

advised that as a result of targeted recruitment schemes 48% of the workforce were women, and that 45% of new recruits were female leading to workforce more representative of its community.

The Chief Constable highlighted to members the results of the force review restructure a cost saving scheme that resulted in the creation of five local command units for Oxfordshire resulting in clear lines of accountability, more resilient commands from dedicated Chief Superintendent oversight, and more dynamic deployment of resources across the region.

The Chief Superintendent provided the Committee with more details on some of the operations currently taking place to reduce hate crime, anti-social behaviour, and retail theft in the Cherwell district. The Committee was advised that modern crime had evolved in the wake of digital innovations, and that emphasis was being placed on targeting online retail scams, sale of stolen items and wider misinformation and cyber harassment and often involved a highly targeted approach working with other agencies and partners.

In response to a question regarding whether TVP were in discussions to legalise E-Scooters and recognise E-Bikes as mopeds to bring both into the legal framework, the Police and Crime Commissioner explained that TVP were in consultation with industry partners as well as the Department for Transport on ways to regularise public use of private E-bikes and E-Scooters in a safe and legal way.

In response to a question regarding data on how many vehicles and goods had been recovered to their rightful owners, the Chief Superintendent explained the recovery and reuniting of goods with their original and rightful owners was complicated due to many factors such as no claimants coming forward or identifying which particular retail store goods were taken from. Members were advised that the police database did log instances of recoveries of property, it was not a data set widely published by forces nationwide and that more detailed information on vehicle recoveries were provided by the Motor Insurance Bureau.

In response to a question regarding how, in light of recent public scandals within the Metropolitan Police, Thames Valley Police managed staff conduct, and internal scrutiny of professional practices, with particular reference to the influx of new officers from the rise in recruitment, the Chief Constable explained that the force focused on a robust internal reporting system and infrastructure where staff were supported and encouraged to challenge and report problematic behaviour. Members were also advised that dismissals of officers for poor conduct were taken seriously and handled on a regular basis to ensure a high standard of conduct within the force.

The Chairman thanked the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety, the Police and Crime Commissioner, the Chief Constable and Superintendent for their attendance and presentations.

**Resolved**

- (1) That having given due consideration, the presentations of the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and Thames Valley Police be noted.

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## **Work Programme Update**

The Committee considered the indicative work programme for the remainder of the 2025-2026 Municipal Year.

It was proposed by Councillor Rogers and seconded by Councillor Broad and agreed that an item relating to lessons learned from the illegal landfill at Kidlington, be included in the Work Programme 2025 – 2026.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That, subject to the inclusion of an item relating to lessons learned from the illegal landfill at Kidlington, the Work Programme 2025 – 2026 be approved.

The meeting ended at 8.09 pm

Chair:

Date:

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This report is public	
<b>Executive Response to the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Recommendations</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Overview and Scrutiny
<b>Date of Committee</b>	27 January 2026
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	Responses agreed by Executive 2 December 2025
<b>Report of</b>	Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, Shiraz Sheikh

## Purpose of report

To present the Executive Responses to four sets of recommendations from Overview and Scrutiny Committee, following the presentation of the scrutiny reports to the Executive on 7 October 2025.

### 1. Recommendations

#### That Overview and Scrutiny resolves:

- 1.1 To note the Executive Responses to the Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations, attached at Appendices 1 to 4.
- 1.2 To monitor progress/implementation of recommendations as necessary

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 At the 7 October 2025 meeting, Executive received four end of inquiry working group reports, and one further recommendation from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee (OSC).
- 2.2 Following noting of the reports and recommendations, Executive had two months to prepare an official 'Executive Response'. The responses were approved by Executive on 2 December 2025, and are now presented for information to Overview and Scrutiny.

### Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary
<b>Finance</b>	All actions that have been completed at the time of this report have been met within existing budget. Actions that are still outstanding,

	<p>if budget is not currently identified, will require a separate business case to be approved by Executive.</p> <p>Kelly Wheeler, Finance Business Partner, 17 December 2025</p>			
<b>Legal</b>	<p>As this is a report to Overview and Scrutiny Committee with no decision required, there are no legal implications.</p> <p>Shiraz Sheikh, Assistant Director Law and Governance/Monitoring Officer, 19 January 2026</p>			
<b>Risk Management</b>	<p>There are no risk implications arising directly from this report, as Overview and Scrutiny Committee are being asked to note the responses from Executive.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance &amp; Insight Team Leader, 12 January 2026</p>			
<b>Impact Assessments</b>	Positive	Neutral	Negative	
<b>Equality Impact</b>		X		<p>There are no Equalities impacts as a result of Overview and Scrutiny receiving the response to their previous recommendations. However, the responses to the received recommendations have been developed in line with the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance &amp; Insight Team Leader, 12 January 2026</p>
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could impact on inequality?		X		
<b>B</b> Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?		X		
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>				<p>There are no climate or environmental impacts as a result of Overview and Scrutiny receiving the response to their previous recommendations.</p>

<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>				N/A
<b>Data Impact</b>				N/A
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>				N/A
<b>Council Priorities</b>	All			
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A			
<b>Property</b>	N/A			
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	Relevant Portfolio Holders – Councillor Conway, Councillor Beckett, Councillor Brant and Councillor Parkinson.			

## Supporting Information

### 3. Background

- 3.1 Scrutiny committees have statutory powers to make recommendations to the Executive, and the Executive has a statutory duty to respond.
- 3.2 Scrutiny recommendations are addressed to the Executive, as the main Executive decision making body of the Council.
- 3.3 The Executive Responses provide the Executive's decisions in respect of scrutiny recommendations made, along with any specific actions the Executive agree to take.
- 3.4 Four OSC working groups were constituted during the 2024-2025 Municipal Year – Food Insecurity, Climate Action, Planning Application Appeals, and Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI). The EDI group was a joint group with Personnel Committee.
- 3.5 Three of the working groups – Planning Application Appeals, Climate Action and Equality, Diversity & Inclusion produced a series of recommendations, that were been considered and endorsed by OSC. The fourth working group on Food Insecurity produced an end of inquiry report that provided commentary on their work, but did not include any recommendations.
- 3.6 In addition to the four working groups, OSC made a recommendation to Executive following consideration of an item relating to the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership.

## 4. Details

### **Planning Application Appeals Working Group**

- 4.1 OSC held a whole Committee 'spot light review' meeting in February 2025, focussing on Planning Application Appeals with particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal, the reasons for costs implications and lessons learned.
- 4.2 The Committee agreed five recommendations, covering lessons learnt; member training; development of an action plan; and monitoring improvement.
- 4.3 In June 2025, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) completed a detailed review of the CDC Planning function, addressing some of the same issues identified by the OSC spot light review.
- 4.4 Appendix 1 to this report gives the official Executive response to the OSC recommendations.

### **Climate Action**

- 4.5 The Climate Action working group was initially established in 2022, and continued during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 municipal years. Membership of the group was not limited to OSC members, and in 2024-25 it was chaired by Councillor Grace Conway-Murray.
- 4.6 The group produced an end of inquiry report that included eight recommendations, relating to a new Council climate action strategy; corporate priorities; environmental impact assessments; building emissions; and investment in renewable energy.
- 4.7 Appendix 2 to this report gives the official Executive response to the OSC recommendations.

### **Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)**

- 4.8 The EDI working group was initially established as a joint group with Personnel Committee in 2022, and continued during the 2023-24 and 2024-25 municipal years. Membership of the group was limited to OSC and Personnel members, and in 2024-25 it was chaired by Councillor Rebecca Biegel.
- 4.9 The group produced an end of inquiry report that included 10 recommendations, covering equality and service delivery; equality in employment; equalities communications and engagement; and measuring progress.
- 4.10 Appendix 3 to this report gives the official Executive response to the OSC recommendations.

## **Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership**

- 4.11 At their meeting on 11 March 2025, OSC received presentations from the Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety, the Police and Crime Commissioner, and the Chief Superintendent of Thames Valley Police, in relation to the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership.
- 4.12 Following questions regarding an updated Community Safety Partnership plan for 2024 onwards, the Committee resolved to recommend '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'.
- 4.13 Appendix 4 to this report gives the official Executive response to the OSC recommendation.

### **Next steps**

- 4.14 No decision is required from Overview and Scrutiny on the Executive Responses, as they are a factual representation of Executive's response to each set of recommendations.
- 4.15 Overview and Scrutiny Committee may decide to track the implementation of the Executive decisions and any additional actions agreed, and review any outcomes arising.

## **5. Alternative Options and Reasons for Rejection**

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

Option 1: Not to note the responses. This is rejected, as Executive have approved the responses and Overview and Scrutiny should have the opportunity to note them.

## **6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations**

- 6.1 The recommendations ensure both OSC and Executive comply with requirements as detailed in Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000.

### **Decision Information**

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

## Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Appendix 1</b>	Executive Response to the Planning Application Appeals recommendations
<b>Appendix 2</b>	Executive Response to the Climate Action recommendations
<b>Appendix 3</b>	Executive Response to the Equalities, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) recommendations
<b>Appendix 4</b>	Executive Response to the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership recommendations
<b>Background Papers</b>	None
<b>Reference Papers</b>	None
<b>Report Author</b>	Emma Faulkner – Principal Officer – Scrutiny & Democratic Lead
<b>Report Author contact details</b>	01295 221534 <a href="mailto:democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">democracy@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a>
<b>Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)</b>	Assistant Director Law and Governance and Monitoring Officer, Shiraz Sheikh (Monitoring Officer).

**EXECUTIVE RESPONSE**

**to the**  
**Planning Application Appeals Working Group**  
**Recommendations 2025**



**For decision by the Executive**  
**on 2 December 2025**

**Executive Response to the Report and Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>Name of Executive Portfolio Holder Councillor:</b> Councillor Jean Conway – Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management	<b>Name of Chief Officer:</b> David Peckford – Assistant Director Planning Paul Seckington – Head of Development Management
<b>Name of External Organisation (if relevant):</b> N/A	<b>Lead Scrutiny Officer contact:</b> Emma Faulkner - Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead <a href="mailto:Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a>

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**Overall response to the Scrutiny Report**

An Overview and Scrutiny working group was established in light of performance return for the percentage of decisions on major developments overturned at appeal. Since the meeting of the working group, a review of the Planning Committee's decision making has been undertaken by the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) and a report received. An Action Plan for the management of strategic planning applications has also been prepared. This work informs the response to the Committee.

<b>Executive Decisions (Response to Scrutiny Recommendations).</b>				
No.	Recommendation	Agreed? (Yes/ No)	<i>additional information</i>	If 'No', reason and what action, if any, is proposed instead
R1.	That a Lessons Learnt review be carried out on the planning applications process and documented and made available to members of the planning committee and officers to improve learning and development and contribute to ongoing service improvement.	Yes	An internal officer review of the appeal circumstances associated with planning application 21/03522/OUT (land to the west of Yarnton) was undertaken in July 2024 in light of an exceptional award of costs by the Planning Inspectorate. This informed a review by the Council's internal auditors which was confidentially presented with a responding Action Plan to the Accounts, Audit and Risk	

			<p>Committee on 28 May 2025. The Action Plan is internal document but the Assistant Director – Planning and the Head of Development Management are able to brief the working group.</p> <p>Separately, and in view of the percentage of planning applications for major development overturned at appeal slightly exceeding the Government's 10% threshold, the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) were invited to review the Council's decision making process. Members of the Council's Executive received the PAS report on 17 November 2025 and it is scheduled to be published before the O&amp;S committee meets. Officers will be presenting an update on its implementation, with any specific recommendations, to the Executive in the new year (meeting to be confirmed)</p> <p><b>Actions to be completed:</b></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. O&amp;S Working Group Members to be briefed on the Action Plan. Date to be arranged with the Chair of the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee.</li> <li>2. Confirmation to be provided that the PAS report has been made publicly available.</li> </ol>	
R2.	That focused member development workshops be included in the member development programme for members of the planning committee (and substitute members), with an agenda work plan produced for these workshops, addressing known issues and risks that may arise in consideration of overturning	Yes	<p>Two training sessions for Planning Committee Members were held on 2 and 26 June – one internal and one by the Planning Advisory Service in the context of the above performance issue and the PAS review. Separately, The Head of Head of Development Management hosts</p>	

	<p>officer recommendations to the planning committee, to include the potential loss of Section 106 monies and Considering officer recommendations and the possible implications of overturning officer recommendations should they result in being successfully contested as appeal.</p>		<p>a periodic informal Development Management forum with Members which has included a focus on the implications of decision-making, reducing the number of planning appeals and the percentage of decisions overturned by the Planning Inspectorate. It is intended that the informal forum will continue and a forward plan will be prepared to support Members' needs. Members not on Planning Committee are welcome to attend.</p> <p><b>Actions to be completed:</b></p> <p>3. Forward Plan for internal Members' Forum on Development Management</p>	
Page 19	<p>R3. That focused member development be included to address the role of planning committee specifically in consideration of planning applications against the Local Plan criteria, to help improve the robustness of planning decisions that overturn officer recommendations and help to reduce the risk of successful appeals.</p>	Yes	<p>These are matters considered by the PAS review and in the Action Plan for strategic applications. The internal Members' Forum also addresses Member Development.</p> <p><b>No additional actions</b></p>	
R4.	<p>That the Action Plan being developed address known issues in addressing the robustness of the consideration of member proposals to reject planning applications where officer recommendations would be overturned in planning committee, so that the risk of being successfully contested at appeal may be reduced.</p>	Yes	<p>These are matters considered by the PAS review and in the Action Plan for strategic applications. The internal Members' Forum also addresses Member Development.</p> <p><b>No additional actions</b></p>	
R5.	<p>That a monitoring framework be developed to oversee the implementation of the Action Plan and improvements and development to the planning applications process with a reports to a future meeting of the overview and scrutiny committee, to include key metrics (RAG rated) and implementation milestones.</p>	Yes	<p>A report on Development Management performance, the improvement arising from the Action Plan for Strategic Applications and on the implementation of recommendations arising from the PAS Review can be presented at a future</p>	

		<p>meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.</p> <p><b>Actions to be completed:</b></p> <p>4. Future report to the Overview &amp; Scrutiny Committee to be scheduled with Democratic Services.</p>	
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**EXECUTIVE RESPONSE**

**to the  
Climate Action  
Scrutiny Report 2025**



**For decision by the Executive  
on 2 December 2025**

**Executive Response to the Report and Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>Name of Executive Portfolio Holder Councillor:</b> Councillor Tom Becket – Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities	<b>Name of Chief Officer:</b> Jo Miskin - Climate Action Manager, Environmental Services Hitesh Mahawar - Climate Change Programme Manager
<b>Name of External Organisation (if relevant):</b> N/A	<b>Lead Scrutiny Officer contact:</b> Emma Faulkner - Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead <a href="mailto:Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a>

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**Overall response to the Scrutiny Report**

Cherwell District Council welcomes the recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and acknowledges the importance of accelerating climate action across the organisation and district.

The Council has already embedded climate priorities within its corporate vision, notably through the "Environmental Stewardship" priority, and is actively progressing workstreams aligned with Net Zero pathways.

Key mechanisms such as the Annual Development Plan and Performance KPIs are in place to monitor delivery against agreed targets, with quarterly updates provided to the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committee. Climate Change Programme Board has been created to enable and drive the delivery of Climate Programmes.

The Council remains committed to developing a robust Climate Change Strategy, strengthening governance, and ensuring that sustainability remains ambitious, inclusive, and central to decision-making.

**Executive Decisions (Response to Scrutiny Recommendations).**

No.	Recommendation	Agreed? (Yes/ No)	additional information	If 'No', reason and what action, if any, is proposed instead
R1.	That a new Council Climate Action Strategy be prepared for agreement by the Executive and full Council, with clear strategies, ambitious yet	Yes	Officers have already started working on producing a climate strategy. This is being informed by Net Zero pathways'	

	realistic objectives to deliver year on year reductions in the Council's carbon emissions, strategies, and targets to reduce district area emissions, to be agreed by full Council in 2025.		studies for Council and District. Engagement with every service area is taking place and expected to complete in 2025 and climate team will be taking the Strategy to Executive in Feb'26.	
R2.	That Climate Action be made a higher key corporate priority, reflected in the Council key priorities (to be agreed by Council), to be reflected in the Council's Corporate Plan, service delivery plans, and its annual and quarterly Performance Monitoring Reports, with ambitious but realistic measurable targets and performance measures.	Yes	<p>The key element of this recommendation has already been incorporated in CDC's vision as one of the priorities i.e. "Environmental Stewardship".</p> <p>To ensure progress, the Annual Development Plan and Performance KPIs are in place, enabling quarterly monitoring against agreed targets and providing updates to both the Executive and Overview &amp; Scrutiny (O&amp;S) committees.</p> <p>Officers Climate Change Programme Board has been created to coordinate and drive the delivery of Council's Climate Programme and support District's Climate Programme agreed by the Strategic Programmes Board.</p>	
R3.	That the Council request that more detailed Environmental Impact Assessments be included in reports to the Planning Committee.	Yes	<p>The Planning Committee report template will be amended to include a section on how the development has been considered having regard to climate change.</p> <p>Expected to be amended by January 2026</p>	
R4.	That an evaluation and feasibility assessment of interim options and measures to replace the Council fleet of vehicles be carried out, with alternatives for less CO2 emissions.	Yes	CDC have commissioned a Fleet Decarbonisation pathway study and one of the recommendations was to use HVO as transition fuel before CDC switch to EV.	

			<p>Executive has approved use of HVO as a transition fuel, and Environmental Services is in the process of going out with tender.</p> <p>Expected to award a supplier and implement HVO tentatively by December 2025.</p>	
R5.	That the Council agree much greater focus, plans and targets, for reducing buildings emissions to achieve 2030 Net Zero targets, with clearly assessed deliverable measures to be put in place over the next five years, with clear objectives, milestones, and implementation dates.	Yes	<p>The council acknowledges that it's pathway to becoming net zero by 2030 must change from its current trajectory - this is evidenced in the last Greenhouse Gas Reports which show that emissions remain stable, rather than falling steeply, as required. The need to decarbonise the corporate estate remains a significant challenge and a greater focus is required to ensure we have the necessary resources to implement the required, wide-ranging programme of works. CDC's Property Team have been tasked with producing a decarbonisation plan for the corporate estate and are currently working on rectifying legacy issues from PSDS1 as well as implementing PSDS4, both of which are government-funded schemes to support decarbonisation.</p> <p>Building/Estate Decarbonisation Plan by Q2 2026/27 if funds were made available.</p> <p>Climate Action Plan 2026 – 2028 by June 2026</p>	
R6.	That Council buildings be refurbished with space heating systems replacing gas powered radiators and insulation for energy conservation.	Yes	<p>The executive acknowledges that decarbonising the corporate estates consist of two main elements. 1. How we provide heat, 2. Energy efficiency of</p>	

			building, both required an investment plan e.g. castle quay. which will come out from R5	
R7.	That the feasibility of introducing air-to-air heat pumps in buildings throughout the entire Council estate be investigated.		This is covered under R5	
R8.	That the Council agree hypothecated investment in Cherwell Council district corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.		This is covered under R5	

## EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

to the  
**Equalities Diversity and Inclusion  
 Scrutiny Report 2025**

For decision by the Executive  
 On 2 December 2025



**Executive Response to the Report and Recommendations of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>Name of Executive Portfolio Holder Councillor:</b> Councillor Chris Brant – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services	<b>Name of Chief Officers:</b> Claire Cox - Assistant Director of HR Celia Prado-Teeling - Performance and Insight Team Leader Nicola Riley - Assistant Director Wellbeing and Housing; DSL
<b>Name of External Organisation (if relevant):</b> N/A	<b>Lead Scrutiny Officer contact:</b> Emma Faulkner - Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead <a href="mailto:Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a>

<b>Overall response to the Scrutiny Report</b>	
The Executive thank the EDI working group for their care and attention to this core theme across the whole council and its service delivery. Actions that were recommended through the work of the EDI working group have been progressed by officers. It is acknowledged that this is a developing area of the councils work, and the actions outlined underline the good practice in place and identify how the council could be even better in its performance by reducing barriers to residents needing to use the services we provide.	

<b>Executive Decisions (Response to Scrutiny Recommendations).</b>				
No.	Recommendation	Agreed? (Yes/ No)	additional information	If 'No', reason and what action, if any, is proposed instead
R1.	That a refreshed Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and framework be developed and agreed by the Executive for ratification by full Council in 2025, with refreshed EDI objectives and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) to ensure that they link directly and cross reference to the Council's EDI strategy framework, with KPIs clearly referenced against the delivery of each EDI strand.	Yes	This is due for review as it has been in place for over 4 years. We have requested our Inclusion Champions complete an initial review and provide feedback and recommendations for us to consider.	

R2.	That the Council's Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy focus and cross reference directly and specifically to the delivery of the key statutory responsibilities from the Public Sector Equality Duty.	Yes		
R3.	That Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) audits of public facing services be undertaken to ensure maximum accessibility and inclusion.	Yes	This work will begin after Christmas and will begin in Housing, moving on to Revenues and Benefits, Customer Services, Environmental Services and Regulatory Services and finally Planning and Wellbeing. The audit will approach each service from the perspective of a resident and consider where we create unnecessary barriers for the resident based on protected characteristics. A small project team will carry out the audits and report back rather than ask each service to self-audit to ensure we are holding every service to the same high standard	
R4.	That the Council review all policies plans and projects to make sure that they have up to date Equality Impact Assessment assessments in place.	Yes	A policy catalogue for the organisation is currently in development. It will include an assessment on EIAs linked to all policies that require one.	
R5.	That the Council further explore opportunities to achieve further accreditation and better publicise the accreditation that the Council already has.	Yes	We are already Disability Confident Employers.  Whilst there are other accreditations available, these are not as widely used or recognised as a scheme such as Disability Confident Employer and come at a cost. There is currently no budget allocated for an accreditation. It is also worth considering, if budget could be sourced, would this, along with officer efforts, be better utilised on key matters in EDI, such as, training colleagues and raising awareness on aspects of inclusion.	

R6.	That the Council's recruitment process be reviewed to make it more inclusive and remove irrelevant barriers to recruitment.	Yes	Work has commenced on this and HR are in the process of running workshops with Inclusion Champions and the wider organisation to gather feedback and ideas.	
R7.	That the Council should actively facilitate the creation of staff diversity networks and embed this approach.	Yes	We have created the Inclusion Champion Network in the last 12 months and this is going well to date. This group are able to put forward ideas of changes they may like to see, are consulted on EDI-related matters, and have pulled together a calendar of EDI events for the Council to acknowledge and celebrate.	
R8.	That the Cherwell District Council Consultation and Engagement Strategy 2025 – 2029 include strategies and actions for monitoring response rates among individuals from each of the Protected Characteristics. This should involve incorporating diversity monitoring questions in all consultation and engagement surveys, providing essential evidence for decision-making across all areas of Council policy and service delivery.	Yes	The Strategy is currently in Draft form. It does include a section on Equalities and accessibility.	
R9.	That a full Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) audit of the Council website and communications be undertaken to ensure that the Council web communications effectively engage with all sections of the community.	Yes	This will begin once the service audits have been completed, recognising the budget pressure that may arise from the necessary actions.	
R10.	That the Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) objectives / KPIs reflect meaningful outcomes to be delivered for each key strand, as well as measurable outputs and outcomes (metrics) with milestones and implementation dates.	Yes	Following the approval of the refreshed Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and framework, the Performance & Insight Team will work with EDI Leads to build a set of KPIs to support monitoring of related activities/initiatives.	

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## EXECUTIVE RESPONSE

to the  
**Cherwell Community Safety Partnership Plan Recommendation**

For decision by the Executive  
on 2 December 2025



**Executive Response to the Recommendation of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

<b>Name of Executive Portfolio Holder Councillor:</b> Councillor Robert Parkinson – Portfolio Holder for Safer Communities	<b>Name of Chief Officer:</b> Tim Hughes – Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety
<b>Name of External Organisation (if relevant):</b> N/A	<b>Lead Scrutiny Officer contact:</b> Emma Faulkner - Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead <a href="mailto:Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk">Emma.Faulkner@cherwell-dc.gov.uk</a>

**Overall response to the Scrutiny Recommendation**

The Cherwell Community Safety Partnership plan has been reviewed and updated. It was finalised and published on the Cherwell District Council website in September 2025.

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<b>Executive Decisions (Response to Scrutiny Recommendations).</b>				
No.	Recommendation	Agreed? (Yes/ No)	<i>additional information</i>	If 'No', reason and what action, if any, is proposed instead
R1.	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	Yes	The Cherwell Community Safety Partnership plan has been reviewed by partners and updated. It has been published on the Cherwell District Council website. The plan will be shared with members of the O&S Committee for information.	

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<b>This report is public.</b>	
<b>Cherwell Futures Programme</b>	
<b>Committee</b>	Overview & Scrutiny Committee
<b>Date of Committee</b>	27 January 2026
<b>Portfolio Holder presenting the report</b>	Leader of the Council and Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor David Hingley
<b>Date Portfolio Holder agreed report</b>	19 January 2026
<b>Report of</b>	Stephen Hinds, Executive Director, Resources

## Purpose of report

To provide Overview & Scrutiny with a detailed update on the Council's Cherwell Futures Programme, focusing on governance improvements, standardisation, workforce development, and the agreement of priorities since the last report.

### 1. Recommendations

The Overview & Scrutiny Committee resolves:

- 1.1 To note the progress made on governance, standardisation, and workforce development.
- 1.2 To comment on the contents of this report and make any recommendations.

### 2. Executive Summary

- 2.1 Since the last update, the Council has made significant strides in strengthening its transformation approach. Key developments include:
  - Implementation of a new governance framework, with clear decision rights and oversight.
  - Standardisation of templates and processes for all transformation and change initiatives.
  - Delivery of targeted workforce training, including PRINCE2, to build project management capability.
  - Agreement of priorities via the Executive, with robust business cases and benefits tracking for each major project.

- Clarification of financial arrangements for key transformation projects, including the Customer Front Door integration.

## Implications & Impact Assessments

Implications	Commentary			
<b>Finance</b>	<p>There are no financial implications arising directly from this report. £0.4m has been allocated to the Cherwell Futures Programme in 2026/27. A further £1.1m has been included in an earmarked reserve with the intention of releasing funding as business cases are agreed for future delivery of projects.</p> <p>Michael Furness, Assistant Director of Finance, 14 January 2026</p>			
<b>Legal</b>	<p>No legal implications</p> <p>Shiraz Sheikh, Monitoring Officer, 14<sup>th</sup> January 2026</p>			
<b>Risk Management</b>	<p>The Cherwell Futures Programme is progressing well. As with any major change, there are risks around timely delivery, financial control, and embedding new ways of working. These are being actively managed through strong governance, clear priorities, and investment in workforce capability, giving confidence that the programme remains on track to deliver its intended benefits.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance &amp; Insight Team Leader, 13 January 2026</p>			
Impact Assessments	Positive	Neutral	Negative	Commentary
<b>Equality Impact</b>	x			<p>At this stage, no impacts have been identified; all major changes are subject to Equality Impact Assessments at the project level, in line with the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Framework.</p> <p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance &amp; Insight Team Leader, 13 January 2026</p>
<b>A</b> Are there any aspects of the proposed decision, including how it is delivered or accessed, that could	x			

impact on inequality?				
<b>B Will the proposed decision have an impact upon the lives of people with protected characteristics, including employees and service users?</b>		x		
<b>Climate &amp; Environmental Impact</b>				not applicable
<b>ICT &amp; Digital Impact</b>				not applicable
<b>Data Impact</b>				not applicable
<b>Procurement &amp; subsidy</b>				not applicable
<b>Council Priorities</b>	This update underpins the Cherwell Futures priority by strengthening governance, modernising key services, and delivering the transformation activity needed to ensure a financially sustainable, future-ready council.			
<b>Human Resources</b>	N/A			
<b>Property</b>	N/A			
<b>Consultation &amp; Engagement</b>	Engaged with Senior Managers and front-line teams.			

## Supporting Information

### 3. Background

3.1 The Cherwell District Council Cherwell Futures Programme was launched in 2024 in response to significant financial and operational pressures facing the authority, including a projected funding gap of over £10 million by 2029/30 and the need to prepare for potential Local Government Reorganisation (LGR). Following the announcement of the Provisional Local Government Finance Settlement, the funding gap is expected to reduce significantly, and the council's medium term financial strategy be adjusted accordingly. The programme's overarching aim is to deliver substantial efficiency savings, modernise service delivery, and ensure the Council is resilient and fit for the future. This will help the council to maintain its continuous improvement obligations and release resources to be reinvested into future transformation projects and enhancing the delivery of the priorities of the council.

### **3.2 Initial Phases and Achievements:**

The early phases of the programme focused on a comprehensive review of the Council's operating model, financial resilience, and service delivery. This included:

- Development of a costed service catalogue to provide a clear view of current services and their delivery costs.
- Identification of opportunities for efficiency, effectiveness, and demand management across all service areas, resulting in over £1.8 million of recurring savings already secured and built into the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).
- The adoption of a new Vision and Strategy, setting out the ambition to become a modern, high-performing authority delivering positive, lasting change for residents, communities, and places.

### **3.3 Programme Evolution:**

Following initial success, the programme was thoroughly reviewed by the Executive in conjunction with the senior management team and was strategically refined to focus on three priority areas with the greatest potential for impact:

- Customer Engagement (Single Front Door): Streamlining and digitising access to council services to improve customer experience and drive efficiency.
- Planning Service Transformation & Improvement: Addressing root causes of inefficiency in planning, including process redesign, culture change, and system integration.
- Environmental Services Operational Improvement Programme: Tackling operational pressures and delivering savings through service redesign, digital integration, and performance management.

### **3.4 Governance and Delivery:**

To support delivery, a new governance framework has been implemented:

- The Transformation Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, provides strategic oversight and ensures alignment with Council priorities.
- The Transformation & Change Office (TCO) has been established to standardise project management, provide assurance, and build organisational capability.
- All transformation and change projects are now required to follow a consistent lifecycle, with defined stage gates, mandatory documentation, and regular reporting.

- Executive Leadership oversight has been strengthened through regular progress reviews, clear escalation routes, and collective accountability for benefits realisation. Executive Directors are responsible for championing transformation within their services and ensuring that projects receive the leadership support needed to overcome barriers and maintain progress.

### 3.5 **Workforce and Culture:**

Recognising that successful transformation depends on people, the Council has invested in workforce development, including PRINCE2 and Agile training, and is embedding a culture of continuous improvement and accountability.

### 3.6 **Financial Strategy:**

The programme is underpinned by a robust financial strategy, with funding drawn from earmarked Transformation Reserves. All major investments are subject to detailed business cases and Executive approval, ensuring value for money and alignment with strategic objectives.

### 3.7 **Ongoing Monitoring and Scrutiny:**

Progress is regularly reported to the Executive and Overview & Scrutiny Committee, with a focus on transparency, benefits realisation, and risk management. The programme remains agile, with priorities and approaches regularly reviewed in consideration of emerging challenges and opportunities.

## 4. **Details**

The Council's Cherwell Futures Programme has undergone significant development over the past year, with a strong emphasis on improving governance, standardising delivery, building workforce capability, and focusing on priority areas that will deliver the most significant impact. This section outlines the key changes and progress made since the last report.

### 4.1 **New Governance Framework**

To ensure that transformation and change projects are delivered effectively and consistently, the Council has introduced a single, proportionate governance model. This new framework provides clarity on decision-making, accountability, and oversight, and is designed to support both large-scale transformation initiatives and smaller service improvements.

At the heart of the governance structure is the Transformation Board, chaired by the Chief Executive, which provides strategic oversight and formal approval for all significant projects. The Board meets regularly to review progress, resolve escalated issues, and ensure alignment with the Council's strategic objectives. Executive oversight is reinforced through regular review cycles with the Corporate Leadership Team, ensuring that Executive Directors maintain clear accountability

for delivery, unblock issues that require senior intervention, and provide visible leadership across the organisation.

Supporting the Transformation Board are the Directorate Portfolio Boards, which oversee programmes within individual directorates. These boards are responsible for monitoring delivery, managing risks, and escalating matters that require wider consideration. All transformation and change projects are now required to follow a defined lifecycle, with mandatory stage gates, standard templates, and regular reporting. This approach ensures that every project is subject to appropriate scrutiny and that benefits are tracked and realised.

#### **4.2 Standardisation of Templates and Structures**

A key element of the transformation journey has been the move towards standardisation. All projects now use consistent documentation, including:

- Business Cases: Clearly setting out the rationale, objectives, and expected benefits of each project.
- Project Initiation Documents (PIDs): Providing a detailed plan for delivery, resources, and risk management.
- RAID Logs: Systematically capturing Risks, Assumptions, Issues, and Dependencies.
- Benefits Maps and Profiles: Enabling robust tracking of outcomes and savings.
- Reporting Packs: Ensuring transparency and accountability throughout the project lifecycle.

Templates and guidance are published on the Council's SharePoint site, and staff involved in transformation projects receive training and support to ensure these standards are consistently applied. This standardisation has improved the quality of project documentation, facilitated better decision-making, and enabled more effective monitoring of progress.

#### **4.3 Workforce Training and Capability**

Recognising that successful transformation depends on the skills and engagement of staff, the Council has invested in a comprehensive workforce development programme. This includes targeted training in recognised project management methodologies such as PRINCE2.

The Transformation & Change Office (TCO) plays a central role in building capability, offering ongoing coaching, lessons-learned reviews, and tailored support for teams. These initiatives have helped to establish a culture of continuous improvement, equipping staff with the necessary tools and confidence to deliver change effectively.

The Transformation & Change Office (TCO) maintains a focus on embedding and continuously improving the new governance structure to support robust decision-making and visibility of the progress of the programme, along with improved accountability, ownership, and clarity of roles and responsibilities in the management of transformation projects.

#### 4.4 **Agreement of Priorities by Executive**

To maximise impact and ensure resources are focused where they are needed most, the Executive has initiated a set of transformation priorities for the coming period. These include:

- **Customer Front Door:** Streamlining and digitising access to council services to improve customer experience and drive efficiency.
- **Planning Transformation:** Addressing root causes of inefficiency in planning, including process redesign, culture change, and system integration.
- **Environmental Services Improvement:** Tackling operational pressures and delivering savings through service redesign, digital integration, and performance management.

Each priority area is supported by a robust business case, clear benefits tracking, and regular reporting to the Transformation Board. This focused approach ensures that transformation efforts are aligned with the Council's strategic objectives and that progress is monitored closely.

#### 4.5 **Progress Since Last Report**

Since the previous update to Overview & Scrutiny, the following progress has been made across the priority areas:

- **Customer Front Door:** The initial review of how residents currently access services has been completed, with a draft Options Appraisal prepared for Executive consideration. Workshops have been held with staff and Members to develop the customer vision and strategy. The initiative aims to deliver approximately £1 million in savings by improving access to services and enabling greater self-service for residents.
- **Planning Transformation:** Work has begun on assessing the improvements needed to upgrade or replace the current planning system. This includes reviewing processes, technology, and performance management arrangements. This project is expected to deliver savings of £550,000 to £800,000 through simpler process, better system integration, and stronger performance management.
- **Environmental Services:** An operational improvement plan has been developed, with a business case for the introduction of 3-weekly waste collections currently in development, to facilitate decision-making and consultation. The programme targets savings of £1 million and is focused on

addressing structural budget pressures, improving service delivery, and preparing for future organisational changes.

In addition to the three priority areas, further work is being undertaken to consolidate key outputs into a single, centralised Transformation and Change portfolio. This includes bringing together annual delivery plans, current budgeted savings, the costed service catalogue, and recommendations from PA Consulting. The goal is to create a more joined-up and consistent approach to transformation that supports the priority programmes while helping to simplify and standardise how change is delivered across the organisation.

**Automation:** The Council is advancing its automation plans using Robotic Process Automation (RPA) through Blue Prism to streamline service delivery with initial development in Revenues and Benefits. Several automation processes have already been put in place, improving efficiency and allowing staff to focus on more complex casework. These improvements reduce manual tasks, improve accuracy, support digital innovation, and free staff for complex casework. These improvements reduce manual processing, enhance accuracy, and embed digital innovation. The introduction of Copilot further supports staff by providing intelligent assistance across the organisation.

## **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: Do Nothing**

This option would leave existing gaps in governance, inconsistent ways of delivering change, and limited oversight of progress. As a result, the Council would be at increased risk of not achieving the savings and service improvements required within the Medium-Term Financial Strategy (MTFS).

### **Option 2: Delivery the Programme through existing approaches only**

This option would rely on individual services continuing to lead and manage transformation activities in isolation. While familiar, this approach would not provide the level of coordination, consistency, or prioritisation needed to deliver the Cherwell Futures programme at pace. It would also reduce visibility of risks, limit cross-council learning, and make it harder to track benefits.

### **Option 3: Prioritise different areas or adjust the method of delivery**

Alternative combinations of priority areas and delivery methods were considered. However, reprioritising at this stage would disrupt work already underway and delay progress in areas with the greatest savings potential and operational need. Adjusting the delivery model—for example, adopting a lighter-touch approach—would risk losing structure, clarity, and shared accountability.

**Option 4: Adopted the proposed governance Programme Governance approach and delivery model (Recommended)**

This approach provides a balanced and proportionate way of managing the Cherwell Futures programme. It ensures that all projects follow a consistent framework, decisions are clear and transparent, and benefits are measurable. It also supports services to deliver change effectively without creating unnecessary centralisation or removing local ownership of delivery.

## 6 Conclusion and Reasons for Recommendations

6.1 The Council has made meaningful progress in strengthening its transformation governance, standardising delivery approaches, and building the capability needed to deliver change well. The introduction of a single, proportionate governance framework, supported by clearer roles, consistent project standards, and improved reporting, has created a more transparent and disciplined approach to managing transformation activity.

Executive leadership is visible and has an active role in overseeing the programme, with the Transformation Board and Corporate Leadership Team providing strategic direction, resolving escalated issues, and ensuring accountability for delivery. This enhanced oversight helps maintain organisational focus, supports stronger decision-making, and ensures that transformation activity continues to align with the Council's priorities.

Together, these improvements are essential for achieving required savings, improving service outcomes, and preparing the organisation for future challenges.

Overview & Scrutiny is invited to note the progress made, consider the strengthened governance and leadership arrangements, and provide feedback to support ongoing improvement.

### Decision Information

<b>Key Decision</b>	N/A
<b>Subject to Call in</b>	N/A
<b>If not, why not subject to call in</b>	N/A
<b>Ward(s) Affected</b>	N/A

### Document Information

<b>Appendices</b>	
<b>Report Author</b>	Charlene Greenaway

<b>Report Author contact details</b>	Charlene.greenaway@cherwell-dc.gov.uk 01295 221885
<b>Corporate Director Approval (unless Corporate Director or Statutory Officer report)</b>	Stephen Hinds, Executive Director, Resources. 13 <sup>th</sup> January 2026

## Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme 2025-26

(Updated: 16 January 2026)

Items allocated to specific meeting dates		
<b>24 March 2026</b>		
<b>Draft Performance Outcomes Framework 2026-27</b>	<p>Performance Monitoring.</p> <p>To consider and make comments / recommendations to Executive on the draft Performance Outcomes Framework for 2026-2027 prior to Executive adoption of the framework</p>	<p>Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader</p> <p><b>Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Councillor Chris Brant</b></p>
<b>Temporary Accommodation (Previously referred to as Homelessness and Rough Sleeping)</b>  Suggestion from Cllr Lynne Parsons	<p>Progress against the new Temporary Accommodation Policy</p> <p>Cllr Parsons revised the remit of this suggested topic following the recent approval of the new Temporary Accommodation Policy (Executive 1 July 2025)</p>	<p>Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services</p> <p>Richard Smith, Head of Housing</p> <p><b>Portfolio Holder for Housing, Councillor Nick Cotter</b></p>
<b>Action Plans stemming from Planning and Development</b>  <b>To include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• PAS Review</li> <li>• Merton College PR9 Site Appeal</li> <li>• Housing Delivery Action Plan (as discussed at 3.6.25 Committee)</li> </ul>	<p>Holding the Executive to account</p> <p>Multiple items across the year; Scrutinising implementation of the various action plans.</p> <p><b>An initial update on implementation of the various plans.</b></p>	<p>David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning &amp; Paul Seckington, Head of Development Management</p> <p><b>Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway</b></p>

Suggestion from Monitoring Officer		
<b>Performance of S106 delivery</b>  Raised by Cllr Dr Isabel Creed, with additional detail raised by Cllr David Rogers	Many housing developments across the district, particularly in Banbury, are having houses built but then developers appear to not be completing additional infrastructure such as play parks. Item to also include expansion and delivery of primary care <b>Could be covered under transformation item in future, due to possible changes to how S106 agreements are monitored.</b> <b>Initial OSC aspect could be current enforcement of S106 Developer Agreements.</b> <b>New chair has requested for 25-26 Municipal Year.</b>	David Peckford, Assistant Director – Planning <b>Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway</b>
<b>Overview and Scrutiny Committee Annual Report</b>	To consider the draft annual report of the Committee, prior to submission to full Council	Emma Faulkner, Principal Officer – Scrutiny and Democratic Lead
<b>To be allocated – remaining 25-26 Year</b>		
<b>Graven Hill</b>	Holding Executive to Account/External Scrutiny Review planning process for Phase 2 July 2026, then annually – review of previous year's performance and monitoring of Phase 2 implementation. <b>Timing of this element is dependent on the planning process.</b>	Stephen Hinds, Shareholder Representative <b>Leader &amp; Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor David Hingley</b>
<b>To be allocated to 2026-27 work programme</b>		
<b>***NEW*** Lessons Learnt from Kidlington Illegal Landfill</b>	External Scrutiny To review lessons learnt from the recent illegal landfill at Kidlington, with the Environment Agency invited to attend	Tim Hughes, Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety Nicola Riley, Interim Executive Director Neighbourhood Services

		<b>Councillor Ian Middleton, Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Services</b>
<b>Year end Performance Monitoring 2025/26</b>	Performance Monitoring To consider the year end performance report, with a focus on amber / red indicators, and provide comments to the Executive.	Celia Prado-Teeling, Performance and Insight Team Leader <b>Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services, Councillor Chris Brant</b>
<b>Action Plans stemming from Planning and Development</b> <b>To include:</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• PAS Review</li><li>• Merton College PR9 Site Appeal</li><li>• Housing Delivery Action Plan (as discussed at 3.6.25 Committee)</li></ul> <p>Suggestion from Monitoring Officer</p>	Holding the Executive to account Multiple items across the year; Scrutinising implementation of the various action plans. <b>Full detailed report on each action plan.</b>	David Peckford, Assistant Director Planning & Paul Seckington, Head of Development Management <b>Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway</b>
<b>Cherwell Futures Programme (previously Transformation Programme) (may feed into Local Government Reorganisation and Budget Planning)</b> <b>Suggestion from Chief Executive</b>	Holding the Executive to account. To consider regular updates on the transformation programme; initial 'Case for Change'. <b>To become an annual item.</b>	Stephen Hinds, Executive Director Resources Charlene Greenaway, Transformation Programme Manager <b>Leader &amp; Portfolio Holder for Strategic Leadership, Councillor David Hingley</b>

**Meeting dates 2025-26 (All Tuesday 6:30pm unless indicated)**

9 September; 14 October; 11 November; 16 December; 27 January; 24 March.

Members are reminded of the five roles of scrutiny when considering items for the work programme:

Performance Monitoring; Policy Development; Policy Review; Holding the Executive to Account; External Scrutiny

The Executive Forward Plan is [published on the Cherwell District Council website monthly.](#)



# **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**
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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 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 information<sup>1</sup>

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.

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<sup>1</sup> 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 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](#)<sup>2</sup> and the [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance](#)<sup>3</sup> issued by the Ministry of Housing, Communities & Local Government.*

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<sup>2</sup> The Cherwell District Council Constitution

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

(Accessed 11 February 2025).

<sup>3</sup> 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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