

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 minute⁵³ 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.

45

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: