



Cherwell

DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report 2025/26

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Foreword

It is my pleasure to present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's Annual Report for 2025–2026. This report highlights the important role scrutiny continues to play in strengthening governance, promoting transparency, and supporting effective decision-making across Cherwell District Council.

Over the past year, the Committee has undertaken a wide-ranging programme of work, reviewing key areas such as housing delivery, community safety, environmental services, and corporate performance. Through both pre-decision scrutiny and post-decision review, Members have constructively challenged proposals, contributed to policy development, and helped ensure that the Council continues to deliver value for residents.

I am particularly pleased with the breadth of issues considered, from the Housing Delivery Action Plan and Temporary Accommodation policy, to oversight of the Cherwell Futures transformation programme and scrutiny of fly-tipping and safeguarding arrangements. These demonstrate the Committee's commitment to focusing on matters of real importance to our communities.

The Committee has also continued to strengthen accountability by engaging with partners such as Thames Valley Police and the Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership, ensuring that local priorities are robustly examined and outcomes clearly understood.

I would like to thank all Members of the Committee for their dedication and collaborative approach during the year, as well as officers and partner organisations who have supported our work and contributed valuable evidence. I would especially like to acknowledge Councillors Lynne Parsons and Phil Chapman, who started the year as Chair and Vice-Chair respectively, and lead on building the work programme for the year which myself and Councillor Dr Isabel Creed took ownership of when we were elected to our roles in November.

Looking ahead, the Committee will continue to build on this year's work, monitoring the impact of its recommendations and maintaining a strong focus on improving outcomes for residents.

Councillor David Rogers
Chairman, Overview and Scrutiny Committee
November 2025 - 2026

1. Overview and Scrutiny at Cherwell District Council

- 1.1. Cherwell District Council established one Overview and Scrutiny Committee to undertake the statutory scrutiny function. This committee meets throughout the year to consider a range of issues across the Council departments and services to provide accountability and contribute to policy and service review.
- 1.2. Overview and Scrutiny Committees are led by elected Members of local authority councils and provide a check and balance to Council decision making and a vehicle for Members of the Council who are not part of the Council's Executive to contribute to the decision making process.
- 1.3. The Membership of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee this year was:
 - Councillor David Rogers (Chair, November to Municipal Year End)
 - Councillor Dr Isabel Creed (Vice Chair, November to Municipal Year End)
 - Councillor Lynne Parsons (Chair June to November)
 - Councillor Phil Chapman (Vice Chair, June to November)
 - Councillor Gordon Blakeway
 - Councillor John Broad
 - Councillor Gemma Coton
 - Councillor Frank Ideh
 - Councillor Harry Knight
 - Councillor Simon Lytton
 - Councillor Zoe McLernon (June to November)
 - Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke (June to November)
 - Councillor Dom Vaitkus (November to Municipal Year End)
 - Councillor Barry Wood
- 1.4. The Committee meets eight times a year (in addition to any special meetings) to consider issues across the range of council policy and service areas, which it selects and sets out in its Annual Scrutiny Work Programme. In addition to considering issues at its main committee meetings, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee may establish Scrutiny Working Groups to consider matters in more depth and more informally outside of the main committee and report back.
- 1.5. After considering any issue, the Committee may make reports and recommendations to the Council's Executive, which is required to respond, setting out any actions it will take.
- 1.6. The Overview and Scrutiny is a key part of the Council's overall governance arrangements and central to the Council's democratic decision making. Through its scrutiny inquiries, the Committee also helps to drive improvement and development of Council services, as well as providing greater public accountability and transparency to decision making. It can help test out if policies, proposals and services are effective and provide best value.

- 1.7. In carrying out its scrutiny inquiries, the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its Scrutiny Working Groups can require Members of the Executive and senior officers to answer questions in committee, consider commissioned reports from Council departments and hear evidence from external organisations and people, including expert witnesses. This can help to add value to the decision making process by drawing on the knowledge of people and organisations both inside and outside of the Council and considering different perspectives.
- 1.8. Through out the year this has included pre-decision scrutiny, where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee considers an issue before the Executive makes a decision, which provides an opportunity for the Committee to contribute before the final decision is made.
- 1.9. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee also has the power to “call in” a decision of the Executive for review before the decision is implemented. Any five members of the Council can also trigger referral of an Executive decision for review by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Although this provision is used by exception, this provides an additional democratic check where Members may wish for an Executive decision to be more widely considered. There were no Call In requests in 2025-2026.
- 1.10. More information on the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee and links to all of its meetings and published papers can be accessed online via the dedicated Overview and Scrutiny pages of the [Cherwell District Council website](#)

2. Scrutiny Inquiries in 2025 - 2026

2.1. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee met throughout 2025-2026 to review Council policies and services across the range of Council departments. These included reviewing the performance and outcomes of Council services to provide accountability, as well as contributing to Council policy and service development.

2.2. The following short scrutiny inquiries were undertaken in 2025 - 2026:

- Housing Delivery Action Plan
- Council performance throughout 2025-2026 – quarterly performance reviews.
- Crime and Disorder Scrutiny – Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership and Thames Valley Police
- Safeguarding Self-Assessment
- Kerbside Glass Collection service
- Graven Hill Village Development Company oversight
- Flytipping
- Executive Response to Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations
- Cherwell Futures Programme oversight
- Draft Performance Outcomes Framework for 2026-27
- Update on implementation of new Temporary Accommodation policy
- Action Plans stemming from Planning and Development
- Performance of S106 delivery

2.3. The Committee did not have any in-depth inquiries conducted via Working Groups this year.

Housing Delivery Action Plan

2.4. On 3 June 2025 the Committee received a draft Housing Delivery Action Plan from Planning and Development. The draft was in response to the Annual Monitoring report (AMR) that had been presented to the February 2025 meeting of Executive.

2.5. The plan outlined the actions required by the Council to improve housing delivery and achieve the requisite five year housing land supply.

2.6. The Committee made seven recommendations to Executive, for them to consider during their deliberations on the report on 10 June:

- (1) That the Executive is cognisant of the large numbers of people on the housing waiting lists.
- (2) That implementation of the Housing Delivery Action Plan include prioritisation of staffing and resources.
- (3) That more details on the resources to deliver the Housing Delivery Action Plan be provided by The Assistant Director - Planning and Development.
- (4) That the Leader write to central Government on any delays that might be caused by delays in responses by Government departments.
- (5) That suitable measures be taken to ensure that Section 106 agreements are processed on time to avoid delays.
- (6) That further consideration be given to necessary infrastructure developments to deliver the Housing Delivery Action Plan.
- (7) That further consideration be made to risk management of the delivery of the Housing Delivery Action Plan.

2.7 Executive thanked the Overview and Scrutiny Committee for their feedback and confirmed that all points raised would be taken on board.

Crime and Disorder Scrutiny – Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership and Thames Valley Police

- 2.8 The December meeting of the Committee was dedicated to the Crime and Disorder aspect of the Committee's remit. This involved officers from the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership, Thames Valley Police and the Police and Crime Commissioner being invited to update the Committee on their work during the previous 12 months.
- 2.9 The Committee received a detailed update from officers regarding the Cherwell Community Safety Partnership (CCSP), with specific focus on the CCSP plan for 2025-26 and the six key priority areas.
- 2.10 The Police and Crime Commissioner Matthew Barber updated the Committee on the increasing Police force as a result of an ongoing recruitment drive, a reduction in call wait times relating to the non-emergency 101 service, and the introduction of a new AI Chat-bot called Bobbi.
- 2.11 Chief Constable Jason Hogg and Chief Superintendent Ben Clarke explained some of the operations that had taken place across the district aimed at reducing hate crime, anti-social behaviour and retail theft. They also provided detailed statistics on year-to-date crime figures.

Safeguarding Self-Assessment

- 2.12 In November 2025 the Committee considered the annual Safeguarding Self-Assessment.
- 2.13 The Deputy Designated Safeguarding Lead gave a presentation that advised the Committee the annual audit was on hold for 2025, due to changes being made to the Safeguarding Partnership.
- 2.14 The Self-Assessment audit had been replaced with a professional curiosity survey, and feedback from learning from reviews workshops were reviewed.
- 2.15 The findings of the survey including frontline practitioners fostering safe curiosity, building collaborative inter-agency relationships, engaging with learning and leveraging peer support.
- 2.16 An update was also given on safeguarding cases reported to date. The figures continued to show an increase in reports, however the officers explained to the Committee that not all reported cases were confirmed subsequently confirmed to be safeguarding issues. The figures confirmed that the update of safeguarding training was good, and officers were confident to complete a 'See It, Report It' report if they were unsure about things they had seen.

Kerbside Glass Collection

- 2.17 Also in November 2025 the Committee received a report detailing options for kerbside glass collection.
- 2.18 The changes were proposed as a result of the Environment Act, which required all local authorities to collect glass by April 2026.
- 2.19 Cherwell was proposing to introduce the collections from January 2026, ahead of the statutory requirement.
- 2.20 The report also detailed future requirements of the act, including a deposit return scheme for drinks containers, and greater responsibilities for packaging producers to reimburse councils for the costs associated with collection and treatment of packaging materials.
- 2.21 Officers advised the Committee that more details regarding the introduction of various elements of the Act were anticipated during 2026, with further reports being scheduled for Executive consideration as required.

Flytipping

- 2.22 Following concerns amongst the Committee regarding the level of fly tipping in some parts of the District, officers were invited to present details of the Council's approach and response to fly tipping reports.

- 2.23 Although the number of fly tips annually had increased in Cherwell, officers explained that the increase was lower than the average for other comparable councils. 60% of reported fly tips in 2023-24 involved household waste, an increase of 5% for the 2022-23 period.
- 2.24 Officers from Environmental Protection explained that the team analysed reported incidents on a ward-by-ward basis to identify target areas. Reporting software was also being improved to ensure that as much evidence as possible was recorded, to assist with identifying and prosecuting offenders.
- 2.25 The Committee also expressed concerns regarding the large-scale fly tip that had been reported near the River Cherwell in Kidlington. Officers clarified that due to the scale and nature of the case, the incident was being treated as an illegal land fill. The classification of the incident meant it was owned by the Environment Agency, working alongside Thames Valley Police as required.
- 2.26 The Committee agreed to add consideration of the Kidlington illegal land fill incident to their outline work programme for 2026-27, subject to agreement from the Committee in the new municipal year.

Cherwell Futures Programme oversight

- 2.27 In January 2026 the Committee received an oversight of work completed to date in relation to the Cherwell Futures transformation programme.
- 2.28 The Leader of the Council, Councillor David Hingley, gave a presentation that detailed the three main themes of the programme; the Customer front door, planning transformation, and environmental services improvements. The programme was currently on track to achieve the target savings of £3 to £4 million pounds across the medium-term financial period.
- 2.29 The officers explained that whilst the transformation work was underway, the timetable in relation to Local Government Reorganisation was being monitored. This gave the various themes opportunities to evolve in relation to LGR decisions as and when necessary, to prevent work being aborted.

Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy 2026-27

- 2.30 In March 2026 the Committee were presented with details of the new Corporate Performance and Insight Strategy and Annual Delivery Plan milestones for 2026-27.
- 2.31 Both documents outlined how performance management, data and insight would be used to support effective governance, informed decision-making and improved outcomes for residents over the coming year.
- 2.32 The strategy included proposed corporate and directorate specific key performance indicators, which had been reviewed during the annual service planning process and were consistent with the previous year.

- 2.33 The Committee were asked to provide comments or recommendations to Executive, who were considering the strategy at their April meeting.
- 2.34 The Committee requested that Executive give consideration to additional performance measures relating to the evaluation of the investment in Castle Quay, ensuring that social impact, environmental outcomes and growth potential were monitored alongside the existing financial and treasury management indicators. Executive noted the recommendation.

Update on implementation of new Temporary Accommodation policy

- 2.35 Also in March 2026 the Committee received a detailed presentation in relation to the Temporary Accommodation Policy.
- 2.36 Following Executive approval of a new Temporary Accommodation Policy in July 2025, the Committee requested an update on performance of the new policy.
- 2.37 The presentation explained the definition of Temporary Accommodation and when it was used, as well as:
- The purpose of the policy
 - Strategic links with wider housing strategies
 - Usage, rates and trends in temporary accommodation
 - Changes in delivery and management
 - Work being undertaken in relation to homelessness prevention and vulnerable groups
 - Improving access to long term housing options
- 2.38 The Committee thanked the officers for the comprehensive presentation, and answers to their detailed questions.

Action Plans stemming from Planning and Development – Response to Planning Advisory Service Review of Planning Committee Decision Making

- 2.39 Following on from the Housing Delivery Action Plan discussion in June 2025, the Committee requested updates on all action plans stemming from the Planning and Development team.
- 2.40 The first of these updates was presented in March 2026, and related to the Planning Advisory Service (PAS) Review of Planning Committee decision making.
- 2.41 PAS carried out a review in May 2025, with a detailed report issued to the Council in August that included nine recommendations for improvement. Some of the recommendations crossed over with the Committee's own recommendations following the spotlight review carried out in February 2025 (see para 3.14 to 3.17 below).

- 2.42 The report received by Overview and Scrutiny detailed the response, current status and actions taken in relation to the PAS recommendations.
- 2.43 The Committee were asked to consider the update and make any comments or recommendation to the Executive, who considered the report at their April meeting.
- 2.44 Paragraph 6.1 of the PAS report referred to many councils having dispensed with the questions stage before debate on a planning application, and commented that CDC would need to consider whether it should do the same.
- 2.45 Overview and Scrutiny Committee expressed support for the dispensing of questions prior to debate, and the comment was formally submitted to Executive.

Performance of S106 delivery

- 2.46 The final substantive item considered by the Committee in 2025-26 related to the performance of Section 106 (S106) delivery.
- 2.47 Officers received a presentation that covered how S106 agreements are agreed; how they are monitored and delivered; factors and constraints behind infrastructure delivery; and a spotlight on health contributions.
- 2.48 Regarding health contributions, the Planning Enforcement Team Leader explained that funds were held by the Council until they were requested for a project by the Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire West Integrated Care Board (BOB ICB).
- 2.49 £580,000 was currently held by the Council for healthcare infrastructure, and no funds had been requested since 2019/20. The Planning Enforcement Team Leader advised that details of all funds held were included in the infrastructure planning statement, that was published on the Council's website for transparency.
- 2.50 The Committee thanked the officers for the detailed presentation and responses to questions, and agreed that a similar session should be held in future in relation to specific infrastructure projects such as playparks.

3. Scrutiny Working Groups

- 3.1. Scrutiny Working Groups are informal working parties that are established by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider particular matters. They are made up of non-Executive Members of the Council appointed by the Committee.
- 3.2. There were no new Scrutiny Working Groups established during 2025-26, but the recommendations of the previous groups were officially presented to Executive for their consideration.
- 3.3. Scrutiny Committees have statutory powers to make recommendations to the Executive, as detailed in Section 9F of the Local Government Act 2000. The Executive has a statutory duty to respond to recommendations made, detailed in section 9FE of the same Act.
- 3.4. When Executive have received notice of recommendations, they have two months to respond.
- 3.5. All four sets of recommendations were presented to Executive in October 2025, with responses agreed in December 2025. Overview and Scrutiny noted the updates at their meeting in January 2026.
- 3.6. The following paragraphs are a reminder of the recommendations made by the various working groups.

Equalities and Diversity

- 3.7. This Scrutiny inquiry was established to review the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion strategies. This included reviewing the implementation of the Council's *Including Everyone* framework, reviewing the performance against the Council's Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives, reviewing the development of the Council's new Equality, Diversity and Inclusion objectives for 2025-2026 and reviewing the arrangements for engagement and feedback with groups with 'protected characteristics' to help inform policy and approach.
- 3.8. At the end of the scrutiny inquiry the Scrutiny Working Group put forward a draft report and ten recommendations to the Executive, which were adopted by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in March 2025.
- 3.9. These included recommendations for a refreshed Council Equality Diversity and Inclusion (EDI) strategy and framework, EDI audits of public facing council services, a review of all policies plans and projects to make sure that they have up to date Equality Impact Assessment assessments, a review of the Council's recruitment process, an EDI audit of the Council's website and

communications, and a refresh of the council's EDI objectives and KPIs to make sure they are focused and measurable.

Climate Action

- 3.10. Cherwell Council declared a Climate Emergency in 2019 and as part of this committed to ensure its own operations and activities are carbon Net Zero by 2030 to do its part to support the district as a whole to become Net Zero. To achieve this, the Council has published a Climate Action Framework and an associated Climate Change Action Plan 2023-2024.
- 3.11. The Climate Action Scrutiny inquiry was established to review the implementation and development of the Council's Climate Action strategy and action plan in pursuit of the corporate Net Zero targets. This included reducing the District Council's own greenhouse gas emissions, as well as reducing the area of the district's greenhouse gas emissions as a whole.
- 3.12. At the completion of its work in 2024-25, the Scrutiny Working Group agreed on eight recommendations to the Council's Executive..
- 3.13. These included recommendations for a new Council Climate Action Strategy, an evaluation of interim options to replace the Council fleet of vehicles, and hypothecated investment in Cherwell Council district corporate capacity to manage and optimise renewable energy and new technologies.

Planning Application Appeals

- 3.14. A Planning Application Appeals Scrutiny Working Group was established, made up of all Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 3.15. In February 2025 the working group considered an overview of planning application appeals performance, having particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal (Planning Committee and delegated decisions), the reasons for cost implications and lessons learnt.
- 3.16. This allowed members to examine the evidence and put questions to the Executive Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management, Councillor Jean Conway - Portfolio Holder, and the council's lead planning officers.
- 3.17. Members put questions covering various topics such as the applications process, performance, speed of applications, and costs implicated, as well as applications overturned against officer recommendation. Members agreed five recommendations to the Executive under the following key themes:
 - Lessons Learnt
 - Member Training
 - Action Plan
 - Monitoring Improvement

Cherwell Safer Communities Partnership

- 3.18. 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.
- 3.19. 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'.

Next steps relating to recommendations

- 3.20. The Committee will continue to track progress and outcomes of the various recommendations during the 2026-27 Municipal Year.

4. Scrutiny Resources and Member Development

- 4.1. The [Cherwell District Council Scrutiny Guide](https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s58559/Scrutiny%20Guide%202024.pdf), which sets out key aspects of how Overview and Scrutiny works at Cherwell Council is available here: <https://modgov.cherwell.gov.uk/documents/s58559/Scrutiny%20Guide%202024.pdf>
- 4.2. The [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance](#) published by the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government is available here: [Statutory Scrutiny Guidance 2024](#).
- 4.3. [The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny](#) also publish a wealth of information on Overview and Scrutiny, including the [Good Scrutiny Guide](#).



Cherwell Council
Scrutiny Guide



CfGS Good Scrutiny
Guide



Statutory Scrutiny
Guidance 2024

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee

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

Formal Minutes

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

Committee Staff

The current staff of the committee are:

Emma Faulkner - Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead

Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

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Cherwell District Council

May 2026

www.cherwell.gov.uk