



## **Overview and Scrutiny Committee Briefing Paper**

### **Subject: Scrutiny Working Groups update**

#### **Climate Action Scrutiny Working Group**

*Membership:*

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

*Executive Member:*

Councillor Tom Becket – Portfolio Holder for Greener Communities

*Service Lead Officers:*

Jo Miskin - Climate Action Manager, Environmental Services  
Hitesh Mahawar - Climate Change Programme Manager

*Scrutiny Support Officers:*

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead  
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

#### Update

On 18 February on the Oxfordshire local area energy planning LAEP process and how it is critical to reaching net zero in Oxfordshire. The recording of the LAEP Seminar was also circulated to members for information. On 10 March 2025, the Working Group considered a presentation on The Draft Solar Strategy,

On 28 February 2025, the Scrutiny Working Group agreed its conclusions and recommendations to the Executive, to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

A draft of this report is attached for consideration and adoption by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

#### **The Food Insecurity Scrutiny Working Group**

*Membership:*

Councillor Rebecca Biegel - Chairman  
Councillor Phil Chapman – Vice Chairman



Councillor Dr Isabel Creed  
Councillor Gordon Blakeway  
Councillor Andrew Crichton  
Councillor Dr Chukwudi Okeke.

*Executive Member:*

Councillor Rob Pattenden –Portfolio Holder for Healthy Communities  
Councillor Ian Middleton – Member Champion for Food

*Service Lead Officers:*

Nicola Riley - Assistant Director of Wellbeing and Housing Services  
Edward Frape - Senior Healthy Place Shaping Officer  
Libby Knox - Food and Wellbeing Officer

*Scrutiny Support Officers:*

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead  
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

On 26 February 2025, the Scrutiny Working Group received an update on the Food Action Plan update and Community Activities, including a summary of progress to date, including key aspects of the action plan:

1. Tackle food poverty and diet related ill health.
2. Build vibrant food communities with the capacity and skills to enjoy food together.

The Scrutiny Working Group also received a further update on Household Support Fund.

The Scrutiny Working Group have agreed a draft report is attached for consideration and adoption by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Scrutiny Working Group**

*Membership:*

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

*(This Scrutiny Working Group is made up of members of the Personnel Committee and members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).*



*Executive Member:*

Councillor Chris Brant – Portfolio Holder for Corporate Services

*Service Lead Officers:*

Claire Cox – Assistant Director Human Resources  
Nicola Riley - Assistant Director Housing and Wellbeing

*Scrutiny Support Officers:*

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead  
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

On 28 February 2025, the Scrutiny Working Group agreed its conclusions and recommendations to the Executive, to be presented to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, with 10 recommendations to the Executive to be put forward.

The Scrutiny Working Group have agreed a draft report is attached for consideration and adoption by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

**Planning Application Appeals Scrutiny Working Group**

*Membership:*

All Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

*Executive Member:*

Councillor Jean Conway - Portfolio Holder for Planning and Development Management

*Service Lead Officers:*

David Peckford - Assistant Director - Planning and Development  
Christina Cherry - Planning Policy Team Leader

*Scrutiny Support Officers:*

Michael Carr - Interim Principal Officer - Scrutiny and Democratic Lead  
Martyn Surfleet - Democratic and Elections Officer.

Update

Members met on 25 February 2025 to consider planning application appeals, having particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal (Planning Committee and delegated decisions), the reasons for cost implications and lessons learnt.



The Head of Development Management gave a presentation on Cherwell District Council's planning application appeals, with particular regard to planning application refusals overturned at appeal, the reasons for cost implications and lessons learned.

Members heard that the Council had performed well in the speed of decision making for both major and non-major applications. It had also performed well on the quality of decision making for non-major applications. However, the Council had underperformed on the quality of decision making for major applications. This was as a result of a high number of major appeals being allowed (12) against the total number of major application decisions made in the assessment period (114). This resulted in a figure of 10.53% of appeals allowed, which was over the 10% threshold set by the government.

Members heard that, as a result of this underperformance the Council could be at risk of being 'Designated as underperforming' and if designated, the Council might lose the ability to determine some applications and also lose the associated planning fee. In addition, members were advised that defending Cherwell District Council's the high number of appeals, came at a cost to the Council, as such there were financial implications if the appeal performance was not improved.

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 four recommendations to the Executive under the following key themes.

- Lessons Learnt
- Member Training
- Action Plan
- Monitoring Improvement

The recommendations from this scrutiny working group are here presented for agreement by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, as follows: -

#### Lessons Learnt

- 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.

#### Member Training

- 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 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.
- 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.

### Action Plan

- R4) 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.

#### *Information request:*

That the Action Plan be brought to the overview and scrutiny committee for review.

### Monitoring Improvement

- R5) 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.

**Completed by: Michael Carr, Interim Principal Officer – Scrutiny & Democratic Lead  
Date: 10 March 2025**

**Presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee: 18 March 2025**