

8 April 2025

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OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

You are summoned to a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee which will be held in Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB on **Wednesday, 16 April 2025 at 5.30 pm.**



Giles Hughes
Chief Executive

To: Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Mike Baggaley, Adam Clements, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Genny Early, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Levertton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker, Mark Walker and Alex Wilson

Recording of Proceedings – The law allows the public proceedings of Council, Executive, and Committee Meetings to be recorded, which includes filming as well as audio-recording. Photography is also permitted. By participating in this meeting, you are consenting to be filmed.

As a matter of courtesy, if you intend to record any part of the proceedings please let the Democratic Services officers know prior to the start of the meeting.

AGENDA

1. **Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments**
To receive any apologies for absence and temporary appointments.
2. **Declarations of Interest**
To receive any declarations from Members of the Committee on any items to be considered at the meeting.
3. **Minutes of Previous Meeting (Pages 5 - 14)**
To approve the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2025.
4. **Report back on recommendations**
For the Committee to note the Cabinet's response to any recommendations arising from the previous Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting.
5. **Chair's announcements**
To receive any announcements from the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
6. **Participation of the Public**
To receive any submissions from members of the public, in accordance with the Council's Rules of Procedure, anyone who lives in the district or who pays council tax or business rates to the Council is eligible to read a statement or express an opinion at this meeting. You can register to speak by sending your written submission of no more than 750 words to democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk by no later than 10.00am on the working day before the meeting.
7. **The Nature Recovery Plan (Pages 15 - 24)**
Purpose
To update on the delivery of the Nature Recovery Plan

Recommendation
That Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
 - I. Note and report and agrees any recommendations it wishes to submit to the Executive
8. **Community Safety Partnership (Pages 25 - 40)**
Purpose
To note the activities of the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership during 2024/2025 and the latest insights around crime and the fear of crime in West Oxfordshire and the county as a whole.

Recommendation
That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to:
 - I. Note the report

9. **Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Function (Pages 41 - 68)**

Purpose

To present the findings of a self-assessment survey carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition from a structure of three overview and scrutiny committees to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

Recommendation

That Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to:

1. Note the report and consider any additional improvements not mentioned in the report.

10. **Committee Work Programme (Pages 69 - 86)**

Purpose:

To formulate a provisional work programme for 2025/26, having regard to the TOPIC criteria and the suggestions put forward by officers and members.

Recommendation:

That the Committee resolves to:

1. Agree the provisional work programme for 2025/26.
2. Agree the inclusion of any additional suggestions into the work programme.
3. Note the suggested Task and Finish reviews for 2025/26.
4. Note the provisional programme of member briefings and suggest any further briefing topics.

11. **Executive Work Programme (Pages 87 - 98)**

Purpose:

To give the Committee the opportunity to comment on the Executive Work Programme.

Recommendation:

That the Committee agrees which items on the Executive Work Programme should be subject to pre-decision scrutiny and the priority order of those items.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

Minutes of the meeting of the **Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

Held in the Council Chamber, Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB
at 5.30 pm on **Wednesday, 5 March 2025**

PRESENT

Councillors: Andrew Beaney (Chair), Joy Aitman (Vice-Chair), Thomas Ashby, Mike Baggaley, Julian Cooper, Steve Cosier, Natalie King, Liz Leffman, Nick Leverton, Dan Levy, Andrew Lyon, Paul Marsh, Stuart McCarroll, Michele Mead, Elizabeth Poskitt, Carl Rylett, Sandra Simpson, Ruth Smith, Alistair Wray, Liam Walker and Alex Wilson

Officers: Andrew Brown (Head of Democratic and Electoral Services), Georgina Dyer (Chief Accountant), Giles Hughes (Chief Executive Officer), Phil Martin (Director of Place), Bill Oddy (Assistant Director for Commercial Development), Heather McCulloch (Community Wellbeing Manager), Gemma Moreing (Business Information and Performance Lead), Andrew Pollard (Interim Programme Director), Ana Prelici (Senior Democratic Services Officer), Janine Sparrowhawk (Community Funding Officer) and Mathew Taylor (Democratic Services Officer)

Other Councillors in attendance: Andy Graham, Hugo Ashton, Rachel Crouch and Alaric Smith

103 Apologies for Absence and Temporary Appointments

Apologies were received from Councillors Genny Early and Mark Walker.

There were no substitutions.

Councillor Sandra Simpson arrived at 17:33, partway through the Chair's announcements.

Councillor Natalie King arrived at 17:49, partway through the financial performance report.

104 Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

105 Minutes of Previous Meeting

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 February were considered.

The agenda stated that the previous meeting took place 12 February, this was stated correctly in the minutes. This correction was noted.

Councillor Elizabeth Poskitt proposed accepting the minutes. Councillor Stuart McCarroll seconded this, and the minutes of the meeting were approved unanimously.

RESOLVED: That the minutes of the meeting held on 5 February be approved as an accurate record of the meeting.

106 Chair's announcements

The Chair explained that an additional meeting of the Executive had been scheduled in order for the Executive to make a decision on the Local Plan. An additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would be held on 13 May to scrutinise the local plan.

There was discussion between Members as to why the meeting could not be held a week prior. The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services explained that due to the pre-election period ahead of the County Council Elections as well as bank holidays, 13 May was the earliest date the meeting could be held while allowing the papers to be circulated five clear working days before the meeting. The Head of Democratic and Electoral services explained that he would circulate a written response to Councillor Leverton explaining which elections were taken into account for pre-election periods.

It was also suggested that the start time be reviewed as the 5:30pm start time conflicted with Town and Parish Council meetings.

RESOLVED: To hold an additional meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 13 May, delegating authority to the Head of Democratic and Electoral Services, in consultation with the Chair, to finalise the start time.

107 Participation of the Public

There was no participation of the public.

108 Report back on recommendations

The Head of Democratic and Electoral Services introduced the item and explained that the recommendations made at the previous meeting, as distributed in the agenda had been considered but not agreed by the Executive.

109 Publica Phase Two Transition Plan

The Leader of the Council introduced the item, explaining that phase one staff had been transferred over to the Council, and this had been successful. While Local Government Reorganisation proposals had affected the scope of phase two transition proposals, it was considered appropriate to still transfer over some Publica roles to the Council. The purpose of the report was to consider the Publica Transition Plan for the phase 2 transfer.

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The Chief Executive explained the details of the phase two transition plan. The Chief Executive explained that most of the roles concerned were fragmented roles, and that this meant that members of staff carried out work for two or more of the Publica Councils. The Chief Executive

Explained that staff in fragmented roles would be ring-fenced and able to apply for new council-side roles while the remaining staff would be transferred over through the Transfer of Undertakings (Protection of Employment) regulations (TUPE). The areas included in phase two were areas of significant focus for the Council. The Chief Executive stated that there were many people in Publica who would continue to be key to the Council and were doing great work, but that by moving some staff across to direct employment, the Council would be able to create more capacity for West Oxfordshire. The proposals also made sense in the context of Local Government Reorganisation. The roles included those in areas such as project management, contract management and assets.

In discussion the following points were noted;

- Roles that were fragmented could not be transferred through TUPE to reduce redundancy costs. Options for redeployment would be looked at in order to ensure that as many staff were retained as possible.
- Twelve roles were to be transferred through TUPE.
- Work on Local Government Reorganisation would be reported to the Council at a later stage.
- It was stated by some members that in light of reorganisation, Publica may be in an advantageous position. The Publica Assistant Director for Commercial development explained that the future of Publica was a matter for Publica's shareholders.
- It was too early in the process to understand what impact unitarisation might have on staff being offered new roles e.g. if the office location was to change in the future or further redundancies were necessary. Environmental and Regulatory Services (ERS) had been on the initial list of services included in phase 2 that was provided to members when they scrutinised the previous report in September. While this was recognised as an important area for the Council, it was felt due to the scale and size of the prospective transfer, there would not be sufficient benefit in transferring this service to the Council to justify the significant cost.

The Committee noted the report and did not agree any recommendations to the Executive.

110

Community Grants - Westhive Review

The Executive Member for Stronger, Healthy Communities introduced the report. The purpose of the item was to provide an overview of the Westhive Crowdfunding scheme to date and consideration of the outcomes as detailed in the report. The Executive Member highlighted the review summary in 9.1 of the report which stated "Westhive is garnering greater community engagement and involvement and the momentum of groups coming onto the platform and being successfully funded is increasing with each round. It is recognised that the new initiatives take a little time to get established."

The Committee discussed the report and raised the following points;

- The report was good and answered the questions that the Committee had raised in the meeting on 6 November 2024.
- The introduction of the small grants scheme was welcome by Members. Officers explained that a report to Executive in July would include details on the amount of funding and details regarding how this will operate but that the scheme would be broadly similar to the small grants scheme operated in the past.
- The Community Infrastructure Fund (CIF) was part of the UK Shared Prosperity Fund (UKSPF) and it was not clear whether or not future funding could be extended to a Westhive-type platform for future rounds, so this was not included in the funding totals within the report.
- The Executive Member thanked the Officers for their work and also highlighted the work by the Communications Team to promote the Westhive scheme.
- Members asked for details around service level agreements, which Officers stated was not the focus of the report. The Community Wellbeing Manager stated that they were happy to provide further information at a future date if the Committee wished.
- It was important to engage with young people and encourage them to bring forward projects as the report identified that no projects proposed by young people had been brought forward to Westhive. The Community Wellbeing Manager explained that a new Youth Development Officer had been appointed, and that this provided an opportunity to better engage with this group.
- It was stated that smaller organisations struggled to raise funds on the platform and that the future small grants scheme would help them to access funding. Community Wellbeing Manager explained that challenges around the Cost of Living crisis had exacerbated this but encouraged members to promote the Westhive platform within their communities.
- It was highlighted that large grants were also given to organisations such as the Citizen's Advice service.

The Committee noted the report and did not agree any recommendations to the Executive.

III West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041 – Preferred Options Consultation

The Executive Member for Planning explained that the purpose of the report was to update Members on the status of work on the Local Plan, and in particular the preferred options consultations paper. The Council intended to publish the preferred options consultation paper in May 2025 and invite comments and feedback on the draft planning policies and available choices. A cross-party working group had met several times and had received national policy updates and drafts of the emerging planning policies, which fell into three broad categories:

- Strategic, high-level core policies
- Place based policies e.g. for towns and the Cotswold National Landscape area

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- Development management policies, used for day-to-day decisions on planning applications.

The new Local Plan would fully align with updated National Planning Policy Framework, including the requirement for the district to deliver 905 homes per year for the durations of the 20 year-plan period. The marked differences from the existing Local Plan were set out in paragraph 3.4 of the report.

The Executive Member said that he had hoped to bring forward some draft policies in March but for various reasons that had not been possible. An Executive meeting had been scheduled for 14 May 2025 and, if approved, the Regulation 18 preferred options consultation would begin in late-May. The Local Development Scheme would be amended accordingly as it currently stated early-May.

The Committee discussed the report and noted that:

- There was some disappointment that the consultation had been delayed although this was understandable.
- The Local Plan would seek to protect land for a possible future railway line between Carterton and Oxford. The railway line would be difficult to achieve but the Council wanted to keep the opportunity open.
- The Local Plan could go some way to promoting cycling and walking and there was a need to engage with the County Council.
- There was a greater reliance on private cars in a rural district compared to a city and a need for proper off-street parking.
- There was little to scrutinise at this stage since the report was simply an update on the process.

The Committee noted the report and did not agree any recommendations to the Executive.

112 Service Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three

At the Chair's discretion, this was taken as the first substantive item on the agenda.

The Leader of the Council introduced the item. The purpose of the item was to provide details of the Council's operational performance at the end of 2024-25 Quarter Three (Q3). The Leader highlighted the following points;

- Six new electric vans had been purchased for Ubico.
- The amount of planning applications determined within the agreed timescales continued to exceed targets.
- Customer satisfaction continued to be strong.

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- The number of missed bins per 100,000 continued to be below the target for the fifth consecutive quarter.
- Gym memberships remained strong, with memberships exceeding the end of year target by just over 4%.
- Some areas were below target, such as the percentage of land charges completed within the target timeframe, which was due to delays by external partners and visits to leisure centres which was partly seasonal.

A question had been submitted by a member who was absent on the Windrush in Witney funding bid. The Chair read this out: "This project has been in discussion since pre-2022. Was the funding bid submitted in February 2025? If not, what is the mitigation, and should an alternative (such as external expertise from other appropriate organisations) be considered, to enable this bid to be submitted without further delay?" The response to this is included as a supplement to these minutes.

Members discussed the report, raising the following points;

- There were problems with sewerage and water pressure in the new houses in Carterton. A question was asked on how many houses were unoccupied due to this issue. The Senior Performance Analyst explained that a written response would be provided on this. The response to this is included as a supplement to these minutes.
- The difference was between complaints that were "closed" versus "not upheld" was explained by the Senior Performance Analyst. A formal complaint that was processed as such and not upheld was "not upheld". A closed complaint was one that was closed before being processed.

The Committee noted the report and did not agree any recommendations to the Executive.

113 Financial Performance Report 2024-25 Quarter Three

The Executive Member for Finance Introduced the Item. The purpose of the report was to detail the Council's financial performance for Quarter Three 2024-2025. The Executive Member highlighted the following points;

- The income target for Development Management was not expected to be met.
- The refurbishment of the Elmfield office had been completed, with a tenant now in occupation.
- A new dry mixed recycling contract (from October) had led to a £23,000 per month cost reduction, contributing to a £300,000 saving in the 2025-26 budget.
- The Four new vehicles which had been approved in January 2024 had been delivered, reducing reliance on hired vehicles.

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- On Decarbonisation projects there had been delays with the works at Carterton Leisure Centre, but the Windrush Leisure Centre was progressing well, with a business case expected to come forward in June.

In discussing the report, the Committee noted that;

- In 2.18 of the report it stated that a report on the asset review of Between Towns Road would be brought to the Executive in the first half of 2025/26. It was asked whether this would still be the case. The Chief Finance Officer said that teams were in discussion on this but that they would have a much better idea in Q1 of the new financial year.
- While the £54,000 refund of bank charges was welcome, it was questioned why the Council had overpaid this amount of money. The Chief Accountant explained that this was a backdated refund extending past the financial year of the report. Due to the large volume of transactions that the Council undertook, these were due to small outliers (e.g. a transaction costing 2p instead of one) over a long period of time.
- The fact that the Elmfield Office was now occupied by tenants was welcome, and members asked how much money the Council was making from this. The Chief Accountant explained that there was a 20% return on the capital investment from the site.
- There was no reason to believe that take up of the garden waste service was low. W Payment schemes or support for garden waste services could be looked at but as this had not been included in the 2025/26 budget it would need to be reviewed as part of the budget setting process for 2026/27.
- A large number of food waste bins damaged. The Publica Assistant Director explained that there had been a 44% increase in broken bins in January but that officers were looking at understanding the reasons behind these cases.
- In 2.28 of the report, it stated that a capital loss of £497,000 had been incurred due to a pooled fund operated by UBS closing. The Council had not been offered any alternatives by UBS. The Council had set up an earmarked reserve and utilised the statutory override provision to ensure that its revenue position would not be impacted.
- Councillor Natalie King made reference to TAC305 of the report, where it stated that the building can be untenanted due to major works required on the roof. Councillor King stated that she had formally complained about this, but did not wish to declare an interest on the matter. The Chief Accountant explained that they could not comment on a live complaint, but that they would clarify whether information within the report had been misleading and ask that property services respond on how buildings could be tenanted if they had major works that needed to be done.

The Committee noted the report and did not agree any recommendations to the Executive.

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Members discussed the Committee's work programme, raising the following points;

- It was stated in the performance report that the public sector decarbonisation item was now expected at June's Executive, if this was the case the Overview and Scrutiny Committee would need to potentially scrutinise this item at their June meeting.
- It was noted that there were no pre-decision scrutiny items at April's meeting.

The Committee resolved to note the work plan.

115 Executive Work Programme

There was a delegation in the Executive work programme for a new 3G pitch. The differences between 3G, 4G and 5G were discussed. It was stated that 4G and 5G had not been tested for sports. The Director of Place said that they would take this away and look at whether it is better in some cases to use others.

The Committee resolved to note the Executive work plan.

The Meeting closed at Time Not Specified

CHAIR

Cllr Leverton asked a question regarding the specific number of houses in Carterton that have been built but are currently unoccupied due to the planning condition relating to the Thames Water Upgrades:

'Having spoken to the service we can advise that the development consists of a total of 72 dwellings. However, a planning condition currently restricts occupation to 49 homes until the condition is formally discharged. This restriction is directly impacting the delivery of 14 affordable homes. Of these, 9 are Section 106 units and 5 are funded through the LAHF (Local Authority Housing Fund) grant. Cottsway will be the landlord for these affordable homes and are keen to make the homes available as soon as possible. They are actively working with the developer, Miller, to explore all options to expedite the necessary improvement works by Thames Water in order to lift the restriction.'

Cllr Early asked: Windrush in Witney funding bid - This project has been in discussion since pre-2022. Was the funding bid submitted in February 2025? If not, what is the mitigation, and should an alternative (such as external expertise from other appropriate organisations) be considered, to enable this bid to be submitted without further delay?


'Wychwood Forest Trust has submitted a formal Expression of Interest to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for funding to deliver the Windrush in Witney project. This has been approved and discussions with the NHLF are well advanced with an invitation extended to proceed to the next stage of the NHLF application process, which is to undertake a development proposal ahead of formal submission of the bid. The next application window is May 2025. The Wychwood Forest Trust has the necessary track record and expertise to develop and submit the bid. Moving to a different vehicle for completing the application would potentially hinder its successful timely submission.'

The Board of Trustees of Wychwood Forest Trust is the responsible body accountable for the activities of the Wychwood Forest Trust, including the submission of a bid to the NHLF. West Oxfordshire District Council is represented on the Board by District Councillor Rosie Pearson, Green Party Group Leader. The District Council supports the work programme of Wychwood Forest Trust through, for example, the provision of a £9,000 one-off grant to enable the progression of the bid to the NHLF, and Officers will continue to offer support on bid preparation.'

Cllr Natalie King asked how specific properties in Carterton with current repair projects could be let;

Units 1,2 and 3 Carterton Industrial Estate (ex Garden Trading Units) have been marketed for let. Officers have also specified the required improvement works (to bring the units into lettable condition) being mostly roof works; these works are out for tender. The works are being funded from the Capital Programme allocated by Executive. Terms have been agreed with a prospective tenant on Units 1&2 and legal instructed. The Council can

proceed with a lease once the Landlord's works have been carried out. Officers had agreed terms with a prospective tenant in Unit 3 but unfortunately this letting has recently fallen through and the unit is being remarketed.

 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 APRIL 2025
Subject	Nature Recovery Plan Update
Wards affected	All
Accountable member	Cllr Andrew Prosser, Executive Member for Climate Change and Nature Recovery Email: andrew.prosser@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager Email: hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Tatiana Bell, Nature Recovery Officer Email: tatiana.bell@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To update on the delivery of the Nature Recovery Plan
Annexes	None
Recommendation(s)	That Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: I. Note the progress made in delivering the Nature Recovery Plan.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • A Better Environment for People and Wildlife • Responding to the Climate and Ecological Emergency • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	Melanie Dodd, Principal Ecologist Email: melanie.dodd@westoxon.gov.uk

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report outlines the key actions completed and currently underway to deliver the Nature Recovery Plan and is the first annual progress report.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** The UK has experienced widespread ecological degradation and is amongst the most nature-depleted countries in the world, with just 50% of our native biodiversity remaining. The natural world provides a variety of benefits (ecosystem services) that have direct positive impacts to our wellbeing and the economy, for example climate mitigation, water cycles, the control of floods, clean air and water, pollination, and recreation.
- 2.2** In 2019 West Oxfordshire District Council declared an ecological and climate emergency.
- 2.3** The protection and restoration of natural ecosystems is one of the key priorities in the adopted Climate Change Strategy 2021-25. A standalone Nature Recovery Plan was adopted in February 2024 and takes forward and expands on the objectives of the Climate Change Strategy. It includes specific actions to support nature recovery across the district to 2030.
- 2.4** The Nature Recovery Plan links to two of the Council's priorities – 'Creating a better environment for people and wildlife' and 'Responding to the climate and ecological emergency'. It also indirectly links to the priority 'Enabling a good quality of life for all' as the natural world affects water and air quality and is a wellbeing resource.
- 2.5** The Nature Recovery Plan is also a formal report of the Council's implementation of the statutory biodiversity duty under Section 40 of the Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act 2006, which was strengthened by the Environment Act 2021.
- 2.6** The Nature Recovery Plan is broken down into three parts:
 - i) facilitating communities and partnerships for landscape-scale nature recovery.
 - ii) protecting and improving existing biodiversity on sites owned and managed by the Council.
 - iii) safeguarding biodiversity through policies and new development.
- 2.7** To accelerate the delivery of the plan, a Nature Recovery Officer post was created. The Lead Nature Recovery post has been vacant for part of 2024/25 due to the transfer of the Nature Recovery function to the Planning Directorate. From 1 April 2025, Nature Recovery will be managed under Planning Policy and delivered by a team of nature recovery specialists and ecologists, with the Climate Change Manager retaining strategic oversight on Climate and Nature Recovery projects.

3. MAIN POINTS

- 3.1** Since the adoption of the Nature Recovery Plan, good progress has been made with the resources available. Officers use an action tracker to ensure projects and actions are delivered in line with the priorities of the adopted plan.
- 3.2** Projects have been prioritised where they fulfil a statutory requirement, are externally funded and/or strengthen partnership working and empower local communities and organisations.

- 3.3 Since February 2024, the following projects have been delivered by the Nature Recovery Officer and the Climate Change and Nature Recovery Manager with the statutory planning requirements being undertaken by the Principal Ecologist and Assistant Ecologist.

Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy

- 3.4 The draft Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS) has been developed by Oxfordshire authorities and has been publicly consulted on this year. The Council is a Supporting Authority, and officers are part of the steering group, and the communications and engagement group.
- 3.5 The Council submitted a formal response to the public consultation, including comments on Council owned sites to ensure they were accurately represented, as well as feeding through comments from specialist officers.
- 3.6 The strategy is currently on track to be published in autumn 2025 (a final consultation with Supporting Authorities to be undertaken over the summer), identifying over 30% of Oxfordshire for targeted nature recovery action.

Service Level Agreements

- 3.7 Service Level Agreements (SLAs) were awarded in August 2024 to environmental organisations who are spearheading landscape scale nature recovery across West Oxfordshire: Evenlode Catchment Partnership, Wild Oxfordshire, and Wychwood Forest Trust. Each recipient report 6 monthly on the progress of their SLAs The most recent progress reports are from September 2024 and the next update will be received April 2025.
- 3.8 Evenlode Catchment Partnership (ECP), hosted by Wild Oxfordshire, work to improve the river catchment for people and nature. The Council is a key partner and officers attend regular meetings. The governance of the partnership is being strengthened, following changes in funding.
- 3.9 Wild Oxfordshire has provided ecological advice and support to 48 parishes and community groups in West Oxfordshire this year. They ran two successful community training sessions on bat and reptile surveying which was well received by participants. Wild Oxfordshire also hosted The Local Environment Groups Conference: Local to Landscape Nature Recovery Action which was attended by over 70 participants from 47 environmental organisations and local authorities.
- 3.10 Wychwood Forest Trust works with communities to protect and restore habitats and advise local landowners and organisations on ecology and conservation. They also own a suite of nature reserves, including Gibbets Close Hill and Grimes Meadow in Witney. As part of the Year 1 SLA delivery, Wychwood have:
- Promoted Gibbets Close Hill as a vanguard nature recovery research project for West Oxfordshire within the emerging county LNRS.
 - Created wetland at Gibbets Close
 - Drafted a land management plan for Barnes Meadow in Witney, following a public forum
 - Supported the Kilkenny Lane Country Park volunteers.

Windrush in Witney

- 3.11 Wychwood Forest Trust has submitted a formal Expression of Interest to the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) for funding to deliver the Windrush in Witney project. This has been approved and discussions with the NHLF are well advanced with an invitation extended to proceed to the next stage of the NHLF application process. The next stage is to submit a development proposal, with the next quarterly deadline of May 2025. The Wychwood Forest Trust has the expertise and previous experience of developing and submitting CLHF bids. A further update on the application will be provided in the Year 1 SLA report.
- 3.12 The Council supports the work programme of Wychwood Forest Trust through, for example, the progression of the bid to the NHLF, and Officers will continue to offer support on bid preparation.
- 3.13 Residents have been consulted on proposals to manage Barnes Meadow (formerly land of Eton College), and a draft management plan has been prepared to manage the land effectively for people and nature.

Climate adaptation

- 3.14 The Climate Change Adaptation Route Map for Oxfordshire 2025-2030 has been developed by Oxfordshire local authorities and sets out priority actions. There are two priority actions that directly relate to nature environment and assets. The first is to ensure climate change adaptation forms a key part of the emerging LNRS for Oxfordshire. The second is to conduct an analysis of Oxfordshire's habitats, species and crops to determine which could be most affected by climate change, including the negative impacts of new pests, pathogens, or Invasive Non-Native Species (INNS). There are discussions around how both actions can be effectively implemented.

Nature based carbon sequestration

- 3.15 The nature-based carbon sequestration project is research based and funded by Innovate UK. It aims to establish how carbon sequestration can be effectively monetarised through carbon codes and the feasibility of setting up a local carbon market for carbon offsetting. The project is collaborative venture between Oxfordshire local authorities and the Oxfordshire Local Nature Partnership (OLNP) and promotes information sharing with other Innovate UK projects.
- 3.16 The Nature Recovery Officer post is part funded by the project.

Tackling inequalities through nature recovery

- 3.17 Funding has been received from Public Health and has been directed to nature recovery projects in areas facing socio-economic barriers.
- 3.18 Areas of deprivation have been identified that would benefit from targeted actions of nature recovery in their local green spaces.
- 3.19 Engagement with local organisations has enabled the project outcomes to be tailored to local need and build on existing relationships.

Coronation community orchards

- 3.20** The Coronation community orchards scheme provides funding for communities to plant orchards in celebration of King Charles II's Coronation. The grant funding was secured from the Community Living Heritage Fund (CLHF) in 2023. A total of 206 trees have been planted across 16 orchards and range in orchard size from five to 50 trees.
- 3.21** Once grown, the trees will not only provide food but also boost biodiversity, enhance wildlife habitats, produce local food, and encourage communities to engage with nature and their local green spaces.
- 3.22** The scheme has been extended to March 2026.

Verge maintenance

- 3.23** Verge maintenance is under review so that it consistently protects valuable species like orchids. Sensitive locations have been marked on digital maps to ensure that maintenance teams are aware of these areas and avoid damaging valuable species.

Green space management

- 3.24** Council-owned sites are being managed effectively for nature recovery and biodiversity in line with approved management plans. New ecological surveys and baseline biodiversity metric calculations (with associated habitat condition assessments) will be undertaken this spring/summer to refine the management plans.
- 3.25** AI habitat mapping is being trialled at Kilkenny Lane Country Park and will be ground truthed as part of the ecological survey.
- 3.26** Volunteer groups support the management of three key Council owned sites.
- The Witney Woodland volunteers manage the woodland at Deer Park Wood and Deer Park South. They have hardened paths, replaced fencing, carried out litter picks and received an updated information leaflet about the site and its wildlife. The group also work across other sites in Witney, for example trimming hedges and doing litter picks (including Bathing Place Estate).
 - The Friends of North Leigh Common manage the woodland and invasive species at the common and help restore the heather. The site has been recently surveyed with common lizards, grass snakes and slow worms identified.
 - The Kilkenny Lane Country Park (KLCP) volunteers manage the park, and the group undertake a range of activities from botanical surveys to hedgelaying.
- 3.27** A previous BioBlitz was held at KLCP in 2022, the next one is set to be held at North Leigh Common.
- 3.28** The use of glyphosate and peat compost on council land is being reviewed and alternatives are being explored in collaboration with the Waste and Estates Teams.

Woodgreen biodiversity enhancements

- 3.29** Biodiversity improvements have been implemented in the grounds of the Woodgreen Offices. These include bird, bat and bee boxes, wildflower meadows, native (and neonicotinoid free) bulbs and hedgerows, as well as new benches for staff and visitors to enjoy the wildflower meadow, made by a local joinery company. A new schedule of maintenance works is being developed for the grounds contractor.

Community outreach

- 3.30** Community Town and Parish Guide to Nature Recovery (community biodiversity guide) was launched with Wild Oxfordshire, enabled by UK Shared Prosperity Fund, to provide communities with advice for nature conservation.
- 3.31** Monthly volunteering sessions have continued at Kilkenny Lane Country Park to maintain the green space for both people and nature. Activities have included botanical surveys, seed collection, pond clearance and hedgelaying.
- 3.32** There have been many nature focused community events this year, which have been attended by officers. These include Charlbury's Nature Recovery Day, Survival Ecology Day in Asthall, OLNP annual meeting and the Landscape and Nature Recovery event (annual Town and Parish Nature Summit).

Biodiversity Net Gain

- 3.33** The main areas of Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) work have been setting up internal systems and processes, attending training courses, producing guidance, providing advice to planning officers and the planning validation team, supporting the establishment of habitat banks for off-site BNG within the District and preparing a schedule of fees that will be paid to the Council to monitor BNG for the 30 year period by S106 agreement.
- 3.34** The Council pays for software called 'Mycelia', which allows a rapid assessment of the statutory biodiversity metrics as part of the validation process and a more thorough technical review during the determination of the planning application. Officers have provided guidance to the planning validation team to enable them to ensure that correct and appropriate information is obtained.
- 3.35** BNG is a complicated process, and officers are still learning about how to apply BNG to different circumstances, spending a lot of time and effort on problem-solving, advising planning officers on potential courses of action to avoid onerous and disproportionate outcomes.
- 3.36** Officers gave a BNG introductory presentation at the Developer and Agents Forum meeting in September, which was welcomed. A handful of follow-up emails from agents asking questions were also answered.
- 3.37** The knowledge and experience of officers will be used to provide detailed training for the planning team, including enforcement and policy officers, during 2025 as part of the Planning Skills Delivery Fund. The plan is to create a series of short training sessions (for example like the "lunchtime learning" sessions that have been run by other Council departments) to breakdown the requirements, process, and outcomes into manageable amounts, so that officers get the most benefit. Training will also be offered to Members.
- 3.38** Other areas of work under the Planning Skills Delivery project will include preparing a BNG monitoring strategy to inform how the Council should be monitoring the delivery of on-site significant enhancements (within development sites) and habitat banks and using this to report to Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs (Defra).
- 3.39** Currently, around 27% of the total number of planning applications where officers have been consulted are subject to statutory BNG. Most of the other applications are either

exempt or out of scope, for example householder, listed building consent and self-/custom-build.

- 3.40** The following figures are an overview of progress with planning applications where officers have been consulted since August 2024:

Summary of planning applications since August 2024

Date	13.03.25
Completed planning applications with ecology responses	163
Completed planning applications where BNG relevant	38
Completed Biodiversity Gain Plan discharge of condition applications	6
Planning applications awaiting more ecological information	72
Planning applications awaiting more information on BNG specifically	42
New live consultations – ecology comments to be provided	57
Total number of ecology team consultations	292
Total number of BNG relevant planning applications	80
% of total no of applications where statutory BNG is required	27.40%
Planning applications awaiting a S106 agreement to secure payment of BNG monitoring fees to the Council	3
Planning applications refused including for BNG issues	2
Planning applications withdrawn where BNG relevant	2

- 3.41** Officers will be working with the planning admin team to ensure that the Council will be in a good position to report to Defra on BNG in January 2026, including identifying what data is needed and making sure that this can be collected easily.
- 3.42** Officers have spent a significant amount of time in the preparation of a S106 agreement for the Pudlicote Farm Habitat Bank in collaboration with the Trust for Oxfordshire's Environment (who have been supporting the landowner), the Council's legal team and the landowner's legal representatives. The Development Control Committee resolved to delegate authority to the Head of Planning to enter into this agreement and to enter into future such agreements on 24th February 2024. The S106 agreement for Pudlicote Farm Habitat Bank was sealed on 18th March 2025.
- 3.43** A second S106 agreement for another habitat bank at Radford Farm is currently in hand.
- 3.44** These habitat banks create and enhance habitats within the district that contribute towards nature recovery, particularly the aims and objectives set out in the LNRS. Another area of work for officers will be to create a formal habitat bank establishment process that can be published on the Council's website to inform future consideration of those put forward by landowners in the future.
- 3.45** Officers attend the OLNP BNG focus group, which comes together to discuss the integrity of the off-site BNG market, including habitat banks.
- 3.46** The full BNG burdens funding from Defra has been claimed as of the end of March 2025 (£26,807). No announcement has been made by Defra for any additional funding in the next financial year.

- 3.47** There remains an ambition to increase the percentage BNG to 20% in the Local Plan Review process. A clear rationale and evidence base for this will be required. However, ongoing discussions are being had about how this could be implemented and the need to also consider the qualitative aspects of BNG (see Local Plan Review section below).

Local Plan review

- 3.48** Officers are working on the Local Plan review, including the strategic site assessment process and the development of key policies relating to climate, nature recovery (including the LNRS) and BNG.
- 3.49** Officers are considering how to take account of the qualitative aspects of BNG, potentially with an emphasis on a design-led approach as part of the green infrastructure proposals.
- 3.50** Adopted or draft policies from other Local Plans are being reviewed.
- 3.51** Some of the key performance indicators included in the Nature Recovery Plan have been overtaken by events or superseded by the statutory BNG and LNRS processes, for example, the call for sites for nature recovery and their inclusion in the local plan – this is likely to be a direct link to and requirement to contribute towards the aspirations of the LNRS rather than specific sites for nature recovery.
- 3.52** Green infrastructure is still a key priority for the Local Plan and is seen as being the main mechanism for bringing together BNG, climate and nature recovery as part of the design of a development site. This forms part of the ongoing discussions between officers.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 4.1** To not progress the delivery of the approved Nature Recovery Plan. This would not meet the Council's statutory biodiversity duty under the Environment Act 2021 and would be to the detriment of people and nature

5. CONCLUSIONS

- 5.1** The Nature Recovery Plan continues to be delivered with projects being prioritised that meet statutory requirements, manage council-owned land, secure external funding opportunities, and facilitate partnership working.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1** None associated with this report.
- 6.2** External funding has been secured where it assists in delivering actions in the Nature Recovery Plan.
- 6.3** Partnership working amplifies outcomes and presents excellent value for money.

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** BNG is a statutory requirement through the planning application process, but apart from SI06 agreements for securing 'on-site significant' habitat enhancements, associated monitoring fees and off-site habitat banks, there are no other implications to report at this

time. A monitoring strategy is being developed as the Council will need to ensure it complies with the requirement to report on statutory BNG to Defra. The first report is expected in January 2026.

- 7.2** The Council is also obliged to legally report to Defra on the statutory biodiversity duty at regular intervals – the Nature Recovery Plan was the first such report ('first considerations' and 'policies and objectives' reports combined). Updates to the Nature Recovery Plan will ensure that the Council keeps abreast of the legal requirement to report on progress.

8. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 8.1** None.

9. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 9.1** None.

10. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** The Nature Recovery Plan responds to the declared climate and ecological emergency through accelerating nature recovery and climate action in the district.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 11.1** The Nature Recovery Plan is available here:
<https://www.westoxon.gov.uk/environment/climate-action/climate-action-and-what-we-are-doing/>.

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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 APRIL 2025</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP UPDATE</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>ALL</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Geoff Saul, Executive Member for Housing and Social Care Email: geoff.saul@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Phil Martin, Director of Place Email: phil.martin@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Report author</p>	<p>Heather McCulloch, Community Wellbeing Manager Email: heather.mcculloch@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To note the activities of the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership during 2024/2025 and the latest insights around crime and the fear of crime in West Oxfordshire and the county as a whole.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That the Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: I. Note the report</p>
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Putting Residents First • A Good Quality of Life for All • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>YES</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Consultees/ Consultation</p>	<p>None</p>

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report sets out the context and responsibilities of the Council in relation to the Community Safety Partnership and related work. The report also sets out the priorities for 2024/25 and activity undertaken as a result by the Community Safety Partnership members over the past 12 months. Looking ahead the report includes recent data on a number of topics relevant to West Oxfordshire and outlines a range of priorities for the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership for the year ahead.

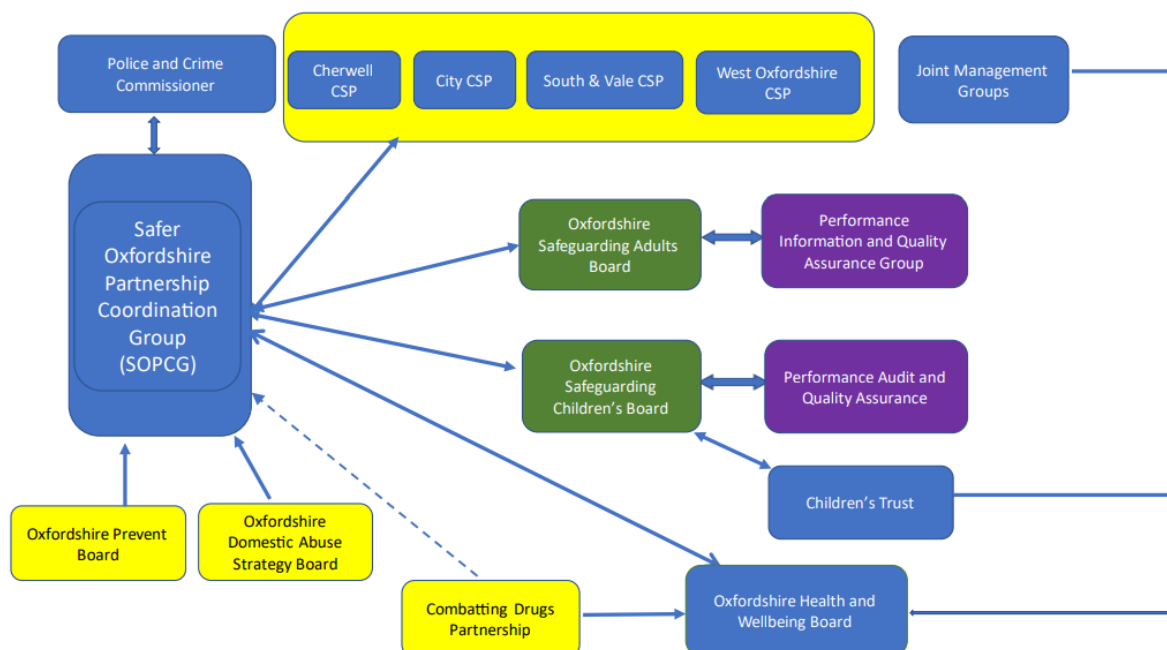
2. COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIPS

- 2.1** A Community Safety Partnership is a statutory requirement of the Crime and Disorder Act 1998. This places a duty on responsible authorities for a local government area to formulate and implement a strategy for:
- the reduction of crime and disorder in the area (including anti-social behaviour),
 - combatting the misuse of drugs, alcohol and other substances in the area,
 - the reduction of re-offending in the area,
 - for preventing people from becoming involved in serious violence in the area as, well as reducing instances of serious violence in the area.
- 2.2** West Oxfordshire District Council, Police, Fire and Rescue, Health Partners (Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Berkshire (West) Integrated Care Board) and Probation Services are all Responsible Authorities and are collectively known as the West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnerships (WOCSP) and the statutory requirements are as follows:
- The Group is ultimately responsible for preparing and implementing a Strategic Assessment and Community Safety Partnership Plan to tackle crime and disorder,
 - Each of the five responsible authorities must be represented on the partnership,
 - At least one of the representatives from each of the five responsible authorities must hold a senior position within their home organisation,
 - Where there is an elected member responsible for community safety on the council for the district/unitary area, they must also be a member of this group.
- 2.3** External partners on the WOCSP are Thames Valley Police, Oxfordshire County Council (OCC) Adult Social Care, OCC Targeted Youth Support; Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue; BOB Integrated Care Board (NHS); Oxfordshire University Hospitals Emergency Department; Probation; Youth Justice and Exploitation Service; Cottsway Housing; Oxfordshire Anti-Slavery Coordinator; Turning Point drug and alcohol service (adults) and Cranstoun Here4YOUth drug and alcohol service (young people)
- 2.4** Duties of the Community Safety Partnership are:
- Bring together local partners to formulate and deliver strategies to tackle crime and disorder in their communities,
 - Undertake a Strategic Intelligence Assessment - an annual strategic assessment is undertaken behalf of all Community Safety Partnerships in Oxfordshire.

- Conduct Domestic Homicide Reviews - this is a multi-agency review of the circumstances in which the death of a person appears to have resulted from violence, abuse or neglect by a person to whom they were related or with whom they were or had been in an intimate personal relationship.
- Undertake Community Trigger Reviews - This allows residents to ask the Community Safety Partnership to review their responses to complaints of anti-social behaviour.
- Reduce reoffending - to protect communities from crime and to deliver a more effective and economically just system

3. SAFER OXFORDSHIRE PARTNERSHIP

3.1 The Partnership provides a coordinated approach to responding to shared community safety priorities across the four-district & City level CSPs. Representation on the Safer Oxfordshire Partnership includes the county council (children's social care, fire and rescue, public health), the district/ city councils (who chair the four CSPs), as well as the police, probation service, community rehabilitation company, prison service, Integrated Care System, and the voluntary sector. SOPCG's broad membership ensures strong links between other strategic partnerships, such as the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board, the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board, the Health and Wellbeing Board and the newly formed Combatting Drugs Partnership.



3.2 Each year the partnership produces a Strategic Intelligence Assessment (SIA) for Oxfordshire. The assessment is a snapshot of crime and community safety. It describes

future threats and opportunities and helps us to understand crime and disorder issues. The assessment uses data from Thames Valley Police, the Home Office, and the Office for National Statistics. The SIA, together with the strategic objectives of the Police and Crime Commissioner (PCC), and the priorities of the district/ city Community Safety Partnership (CSP) Plans, provide the evidence base to agree our countywide priorities. We also now have included a Violent Crime Strategic Needs Assessment as prescribed by the Serious Violence Act - <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/serious-violence-act>

4. SERIOUS VIOLENCE DUTY

- 4.1 The Serious Violence duty is set out in law under the Police, Crime and Sentencing Act (Chapter 1, Part 2) and requires authorities within a local government area to collaborate and plan to prevent and reduce serious violence, including domestic abuse.

“Serious Violence includes specific types of recorded crime, such as homicide, grievous bodily

harm, incidents that involve a knife and areas of criminality where serious violence or its

threat is inherent, such as county lines drug dealing”.

- 4.2 This is an agreed Thames Valley wide definition and Community Safety Partnerships – working together across Oxfordshire - have a responsibility to report back to the Home Office on the following crime types as part of this duty:

- Group 1: All homicide / All grievous bodily harm / All knife crime - inclusive of all ages, location types (public/private) and domestic flags.

- 4.3 Whilst not being reported back to the Home Office, consideration is also given to the following when reviewing the risks around serious crime in our communities:

- Group 2: All actual bodily harm / All drug supply/trafficking / All sexual assault / All rape.

- 4.4 The Safer Oxfordshire Partnership have developed the strategy covering this area and this can be found here: [Violence and Vulnerability Strategy 2024-2027](#)

5. OFFICE OF THE POLICE AND CRIME COMMISSIONER (OPCC)

- 5.1 West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership (CSP) and the Police and Crime Commissioner (OPCC) have a duty to have regard to each other's plans. The CSP invites a representative from the OPCC as an invited member of the Partnership and we consult with them on the formulation of the CSP plan.

- 5.2 Matthew Barber is the current Police and Crime Commissioner for Thames Valley, this is an elected post. The Police and Crime Plan is created and published by the Police and Crime Commissioner and outlines his priorities for the area and how he will work with partners to achieve them - <https://www.thamesvalley-pcc.gov.uk/police-and-crime-plan/>

- 5.3 The current priorities in the Police and Crime Plan are:

- Protecting Property
- Protecting Communities

- Protecting People

- 5.4 Whilst the Community Safety Partnership have taken account of the priorities set out in the Police and Criminal Justice Plan 2024-29 they have acknowledged that not all priorities within the Thames Valley wide plan are required to be reflected within the local CSP Plan.
- 5.5 The OPCC provides the Community Safety Fund, a direct grant to support CSPs in delivering on the actions and priorities of their partnership plans. Between 2022/23 and 2024/25 Oxfordshire was allocated a direct grant annually of £686,820 for use by the four Community Safety Partnerships, the Youth Justice and Exploitation Service, Police, Public Health, Probation, Oxfordshire Fire and Rescue and the BOB ICB. The budget available is set for a 3-year period and apportioned to the whole of Oxfordshire. Between 2025/26 and 2027/28 Oxfordshire has been allocated £804,385.90 annually. This gives flexibility to work collaboratively across the county and to plan for longer term projects with greater impact and time for evaluation.

6. THAMES VALLEY POLICE REVIEW

- 6.1 In 2022 Thames Valley Police began a review into the structure of the force. This was '*in response to a more complex working environment, a rise in digital crime and increasingly harmful and complex offences such as child sexual exploitation and county drugs lines*'.
- 6.2 Following research and engagement with officers, staff, partner organisations and communities, they concluded that there would be a change to a five-area command model, called Local Command Units (LCUs). Previously we had seen Local Policing Areas (LPA's) – for example West and Cherwell LPA.
- 6.3 The five LCU's are:
- Oxfordshire
 - Buckinghamshire
 - Milton Keynes
 - Berkshire East
 - Berkshire West
- 6.4 Oxfordshire became an LCU in November 2024. All 108 neighbourhood teams remain in place as before with additional officers in many parts of the Thames Valley.

7. WEST OXFORDSHIRE COMMUNITY SAFETY PARTNERSHIP ACTIVITIES 2024/2025

- 7.1 West Oxfordshire had the lowest number of recorded crimes in Oxfordshire when comparing to other district areas, with 5,817 crimes recorded between January 2022 and December 2022. This is evidenced in the SIA 2023.
- 7.2 The West Oxfordshire Community Safety Partnership plan 2024/25 is informed by the SIA, including the new section on Serious Violence. The priorities for the CSP in 2024/25 are:
- Serious Violence
 - Drugs and Alcohol
 - Domestic Abuse and Violence Against Women and Girls
 - Rural Acquisitive Crime

- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Fraud
- Modern Slavery
- Counter Terrorism

7.3 The West Oxfordshire CSP has undertaken the following activities in 2024/2025:

- Supported victims of Domestic Abuse (DA) co-commissioning the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service,
- Collaborated with the Branch Chipping Norton on a DA communications campaign highlighting the additional risk experienced by victims/survivors living rurally,
- Co-hosted the Rural Domestic Abuse and Own My Life Workshop hosted by the Branch Chipping Norton on 6th December 2024,
- Provided repeat victims of crime and high-risk victims of stalking and domestic abuse with Ring battery operated cameras to support with target hardening and the ability to provide evidence to support prosecution,
- Delivered the Safe Places scheme across the district to ensure that the most vulnerable people in our communities have somewhere safe to go for help if they are ever feeling unsafe whilst out in our towns and villages,
- Delivered exploitation workshops in Henry Box School, Carterton Community College and Abingdon and Witney College,
- Carried out a Night-time Safety survey in December 2024,
- Delivered the Rural Crime project funded by Safer Streets 5,
- Contributed to strategic activity across a wide range of community safety related issues, including exploitation, modern slavery, combating drugs, fraud, serious violence, violence against women and girls, and extremism,
- Collaborated on the Annual Rural Crime Conference at Blenheim Palace,
- Operated the multi-agency Joint Agency Tasking and Coordination Group (JATAC) to tackle local issues including anti-social behaviour and domestic abuse at an operational level,
- Informed by the Night-time safety survey and utilising Safer Streets Round 5 Funding, working to enhance a number of routes of greatest concern to improve feelings of safety for women and girls walking home in the dark, after travelling to Oxford,
- Commissioned Windrush Bike Project to deliver road safety training and cycling equipment to children and adults at the Asylum Hotel to ensure they are safer on the roads. Funded by the OPCC,
- Commissioned Sundial (previously Oxford Against Cutting) to deliver a programme to residents at the Asylum hotel, educating about cultural norms in the UK including appropriate behaviour in relation to women and girls. Funded by the OPCC,
- Currently introducing 3 additional deployable cameras to Chipping Norton and Woodstock to focus on areas of concern,
- Delivered Modern Slavery training to Council staff and GP's,

- Provided youth diversionary activities in Witney during summer holidays.

8. ACTIVITIES AND INTERVENTIONS FUNDED IN OXFORDSHIRE AND THE REGION IN 2024/25

8.1 In 2024/25 the OPCC funded the following resources across Oxfordshire:

- Violence Against Women and Girls Coordinator hosted by Oxfordshire County Council,
- Oxfordshire Anti-Slavery Coordinator hosted by Oxford City Council,
- Countywide problem solving/ASB role hosted by Oxford City Council,
- Refresh Cafe,
- Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service,
- Serious violence coordinator role hosted by Oxfordshire County Council,
- Countywide Nightsafe manager role hosted by Oxford City Council.

8.2 In addition, a number of interventions have been delivered across the Thames Valley, which have benefitted residents of West Oxfordshire.

8.3 Hospital navigators: Funded by the Violence Prevention Partnership is a project that placed trained volunteers into A&E units across the Thames Valley to offer support to those admitted in “risky circumstances”. In Oxfordshire this has operated in the John Radcliffe Hospital A&E department and overseen by Oxfordshire Youth. Their aim was to make the contact with a patient a “reachable moment” – a point when someone is more reflective on what’s happening in their life. This project has been running since 2022 and ends in March 2025.

8.4 Custody Navigators: Funded by the Violence Prevention Partnership. The scheme works in the Abingdon custody suite. It aims to engage adults to help them make the right choices and to step away from crime at a key ‘reachable and teachable’ moment with the help of a team of volunteers.

8.5 DRIVE: Funded by the OPCC. This is a perpetrator intervention scheme for high-harm, high-risk, and serial perpetrators of domestic abuse. The Drive Project aims to reduce abuse and increase the long-term safety of adult and child victim-survivors by disrupting, challenging, and changing the behaviour of those who are causing harm.

8.6 The Thames Valley Anti-Social Behaviour (ASB) Mediation Service. Funded by the OPCC. This is delivered by Alternatives to Conflict (previously known as Mediation Bucks) and is available to residents across Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Oxfordshire and Milton Keynes. The service aims to prevent the escalation of anti-social behaviour by making mediation more widely accessible to our communities.

9. SPOTLIGHT ON THE RURAL CRIME PROJECT – 2023-2025

- 9.1 The project, funded by the OPCC, operated across South Oxfordshire, Vale of White Horse District and West Oxfordshire District. It deployed a dedicated Rural Crime Advisor to act as a bridge between TVP officers and the farming community. In addition, the funding from the OPCC provided a Project Support Officer, who was based at the Council.
- 9.2 Data had identified increase in rural crime including theft. It had also noted that levels of reporting of crime from the farming community was low.
- 9.3 The Advisor was in post for 6 months, from June to end of November, and visited over 150 farms during this time. Between November and March TVP continued to support utilising existing Police staff and a further 50 farms were visited.
- 9.4 During the visits security measures were installed for free on large and small pieces of equipment, such as trailers, tools and portable equipment. This provided a foot in the door to start a wider conversation about crime and crime prevention.
- 9.5 The visits resulted in a rise in the number of farmers who said they would report incidents in the future. Welfare concerns were identified during a number of visits and the Advisor was able to share information about wider support services and provide a level of reassurance.
- 9.6 In addition to the farm visits the funding enabled the purchase of 50 wildlife cameras - 20 for TVP, 10 for South Oxfordshire and Vale of the White Horse and 20 for West Oxfordshire. These have been used to target Fly Tipping – an issue raised by the public as a priority in surveys conducted by all three Councils.
- 9.7 In almost all cases, where either signs alone or signs and cameras were used, fly tipping stopped.
- 9.8 The funding also enabled the purchase of a number of off-road quad bikes for use by the Police and training for staff. The vehicles have attracted significant interest, fostering positive community engagement. They enable officers to reach remote locations, inspect areas usually accessible only by foot, conduct stop checks, and liaise with farmers and landowners directly in their fields.
- 9.9 A Rural Crime Survey was conducted throughout the project. In total, 90 responses were received - 75% of responses were from West Oxfordshire, 13% from the Vale of White Horse, 3% from South Oxfordshire and 9% were unknown. The key findings were -
- 65% of respondents reported experiencing rural crime, with theft, particularly of tools and vehicles, being the most common.
 - 76% of these crimes were reported to the police.
 - A disproportionate number of unreported crimes were agricultural crimes, accounting for 56%.
 - The most common reason for not reporting crimes was the belief that nothing would be done, which aligns with findings from the Office for National Statistics (ONS). According to the latest ONS's report (Reasons for not Reporting Crime in England and Wales, 2018) 33% of people reported perceived inaction of the police as the main reason for not reporting crimes.

10. SPOTLIGHT ON RURAL DOMESTIC ABUSE

- 10.1** Nationally 1 in 5 adults experience Domestic Abuse during their lifetime. This equates to 1 in 4 women and 1 in 6-7 men. This harm is often hidden from view. In the most rural areas the abuse can last longer.
- 10.2** The 'Captive and Controlled' report was published by the Rural Services Network in 2019. The report captures the findings of a major research project across seven police force areas in England commissioned by the National Rural Crime Network and Police and Crime Commissioners of Durham, Derbyshire, Devon and Cornwall, Dorset, Lincolnshire, North Yorkshire, and Nottinghamshire. This report tells the previously untold story of Domestic Abuse in rural areas; how it manifests, progresses and ends, and how it can be distinctly different from abuse in urban settings. The report is based on the testimony of 881 victim/survivors of domestic abuse - 57 of whom were men. It was initiated on the basis of the significant difference between police-reported data and incidence rates for rural and urban areas of England and Wales in 2017.
- 10.3** Key findings were:
- 10.4** *Abuse lasts, on average, 25% longer in the most rural areas*
- Exiting abuse is harder, takes longer and is more complex for rural victims as there are significant additional barriers in rural communities compared to urban.
- 10.5** *The policing response is largely inadequate*
- Whilst the service provided by the police is improving, feedback from victims shows the response in rural areas is not as good as that in urban areas.
- 10.6** *The more rural the setting, the higher the risk of harm*
- Given a rural victim of domestic abuse will live with their abuse for almost 25 per cent longer than their urban counterparts, and that the pattern and escalation of abuse seems to be replicated, it is inevitable rural victims suffer more harm, be it emotional or physical.
- 10.7** *Rurality and isolation are deliberately used as weapons by abusers*
- Financial control, removal from friends, isolation from family are all well understood tools of abuse. However, we now have clear evidence that abusers specifically move victims to rural settings to further isolate them, or systematically use the isolation to their advantage should they already be there.
- 10.8** *Close-knit rural communities facilitate abuse*
- Strong community spirit is one of the joys of rural life, but it can be equally powerful in keeping domestic abuse hidden and in facilitating abuse – not knowingly, not willingly, but by virtue of the way communities are in rural Britain.
- 10.9** *Traditional, patriarchal communities control and subjugate women*
- In depth interviews with victims and survivors revealed a consistent and telling reality – that rural communities are still dominated by men and follow a set of age-old, protected and unwritten principles.
- 10.10** *Support services are scarce – less available, less visible and less effective*

- Victims were clear that domestic abuse support services are much harder to find and much harder to engage with than in an urban setting.

10.11 Retreating rural resources make help and escape harder

- The availability of public services in rural areas more generally is on the decline, limiting the support networks and escape routes available to victims.

10.12 The short-term, often hand-to-mouth funding model has created competing and fragmented service provision

- Clearly commissioners, policing and support services set out to do their best for victims, but this sometimes isn't enough.

10.13 An endemic data bias against rural communities leads to serious gaps in response and support

- Rural victims are half as likely as urban victims to report their abuse. This under-reporting means much less is known about the needs of rural victims, of what good interventions are, or how to effectively prevent rural domestic abuse.

10.14 A2Dominion is contracted to deliver the Oxfordshire Domestic Abuse Service. The service is commissioned by all local authorities in Oxfordshire and the OPCC. The Council agreed funding for 3 years from 2023 to 2026 of £24,500 annually. OCC as lead commissioners have indicated that they are seeking support from the Council to continue this contract for an additional 2 years from 2026-2028. A further, more detailed report on this matter will come forward to Executive later in the year.

10.15 In West Oxfordshire there is additional specialist support provided by The Branch in Chipping Norton and Reducing the Risk.

11. LOOKING AHEAD – 2025 ONWARDS

11.1 The Executive summary of the [Oxfordshire Strategic Needs Assessment 2024](#) (SNA), which captures data reflecting the whole of Oxfordshire, states:

- There were 268,562 valid crimes committed between January 2018 and December 2023. Of these 37% were acquisitive crime, 35% were violent crimes (74% of which was without injury, 26% with injury),
- While there has been only a 1.5% increase in valid crime (almost in-line with population growth) from 2022 to 2023 there has been a 17% increase in valid crimes from 2018 to 2023,
- The Vale of White Horse experienced the largest increases in valid crimes since 2018, in terms of absolute numbers, West Oxfordshire experienced the biggest increase in terms of %,
- Serious violence has continued to decline with a 20% decline from 2022. It has declined every year since 2018 and is now 50% lower than it was in that year. The police data on the nature of serious violence is supported by hospital data,
- Sexual offences decreased (4%) from 2022 to 2023 but are significantly higher than pre-pandemic levels (22%),

- Both violence against women and girls and domestic abuse have seen significant increases in reported crime since 2018. As with sexual offences this could represent a success for the programs encouraging victims to come forward,
- Violence without injury is the fastest growing reported offence with harassment, stalking and coercive behaviour now being frequently reported,
- However Acquisitive crime is the most common form of occurrence after dipping during the pandemic,
- Hate crime has seen increases but research conducted indicates this is not part of a coordinated campaign and is not associated with the arrival of refugees or asylum seekers,
- Although data is limited there is some indication of ethnic minorities being slightly overrepresented in crime figures (both as suspects and victims), but the problem does not appear to be hugely significant.

11.2 The SNA goes on to make the following recommendations:

- The October anomaly for acquisitive crime should be noted when promoting retail or domestic security,
- There is a peak in youth violence in the time slot immediately after school, this should be considered when formulating intervention strategies,
- The increase in reported domestic abuse, violence against women and girls and sexual offences should not necessarily be viewed negatively as it could be seen as more victims coming forward. However, it should be considered that existing campaigns focusing on respect for women and girls be expanded,
- The peak age group for reported sex offence victims was 11-14, this should be taken into account when formulating awareness campaigns and intervention strategies,
- The night-time economy clearly is playing a role in violent offences (despite the decrease in serious violence) and possibly more work should be done on limiting this,
- The peak age band for suspects of many crime types is 18-21, this indicates that school or school age intervention programmes could be effective.

11.3 Specifically for West Oxfordshire the SNA reports the following:

11.4 West Oxfordshire has the lowest recorded number of valid crimes in Oxfordshire.

	Valid crimes	Population	VC per capita
Oxford	96,209	162,100	0.59
Cherwell	64,923	161,837	0.40
South Oxfordshire	29,796	150,024	0.20
Vale of White Horse	47,386	139,487	0.34
West Oxfordshire	30,252	115,161	0.26
Oxfordshire	268,566	726,530	0.37

Table 1 Comparison valid crimes across Oxfordshire districts 2018 to 2023

11.5 West Oxfordshire has seen an increase in valid crime of just over 40% between 2018 and 2023. It should be noted though that in terms of absolute numbers West Oxfordshire did not have the highest increase in occurrences. A high-level scan indicated the main sources were drugs, public order but the largest in terms of numbers was violence without injury.

West Ox	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	
Acquisitive Crime	1774	1788	1368	1277	1726	1882	6.09%
Criminal Damage	583	602	606	524	552	493	-15.44%
Drugs	83	183	164	162	150	184	121.69%
Other	78	68	75	88	132	98	25.64%
Public Order	142	213	353	680	649	433	204.93%
Sexual Offences	114	136	122	186	214	179	57.02%
Violence With Injury	468	517	434	468	595	608	29.91%
Violence Without Injury	866	1107	1232	1529	1717	1899	119.28%
Grand Total	4108	4614	4354	4914	5735	5776	40.60%

Table 18 West Oxfordshire source of increases (2018-2023)

11.6 There was a large increase in possession occurrences from 2018 to 2019 but numbers have stayed at the same level since. While the total number of supply occurrences remains low it is nearly double the number of supply occurrences recorded in 2018 and 2019, and an increase of 43% between 2022 and 2023. This might not be a cause for concern yet but perhaps should be monitored.

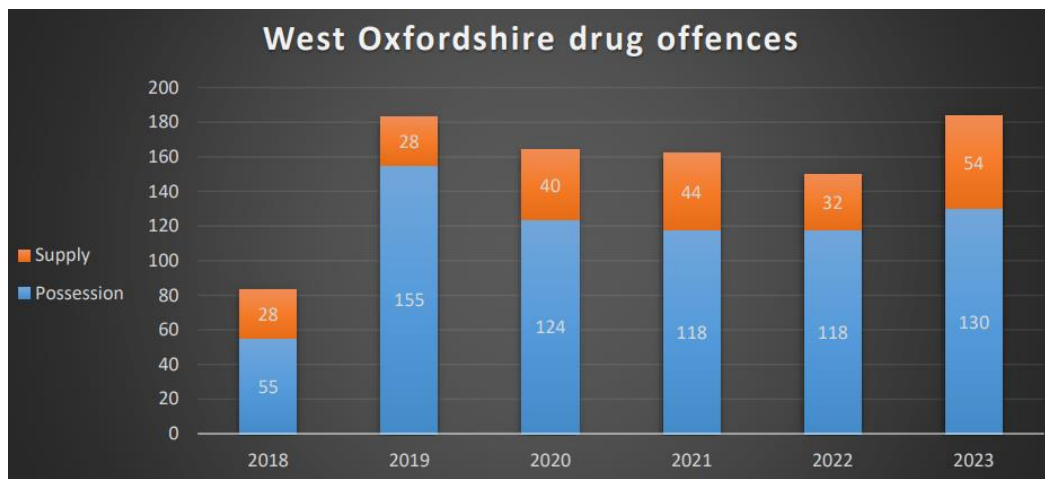


Figure 22 West Oxfordshire drug trends (2018-2023)

11.7 Overall violence without injury has nearly doubled in West Oxfordshire, the biggest component being common assault which has risen by 65%. The other offences have seen very significant increases in recorded occurrences but one of them is a new offence (coercion and controlling behaviour) and the others were likely to have been under-reported. Violence without injury has increased across the Thames Valley so this increase is not anomalous.

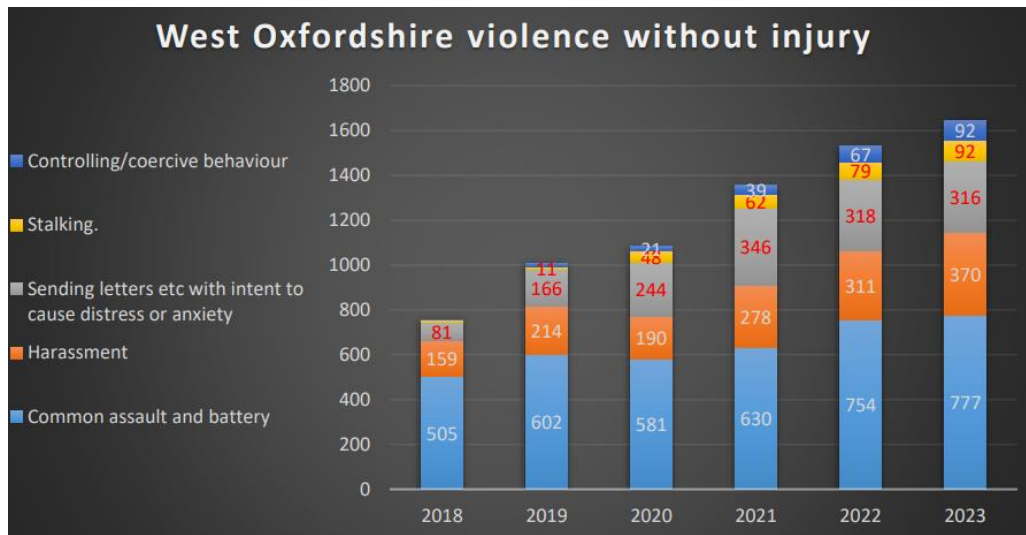


Figure 23 Violence without injury West Oxfordshire (2018-2023)

11.8 Oxford has had significantly more sexual offences than any other district, it had nearly three times the number of sexual assaults recorded in West Oxfordshire between 2018 and 2023. Points of concern are rape and sexual assault which decreased during the pandemic but have since increased.

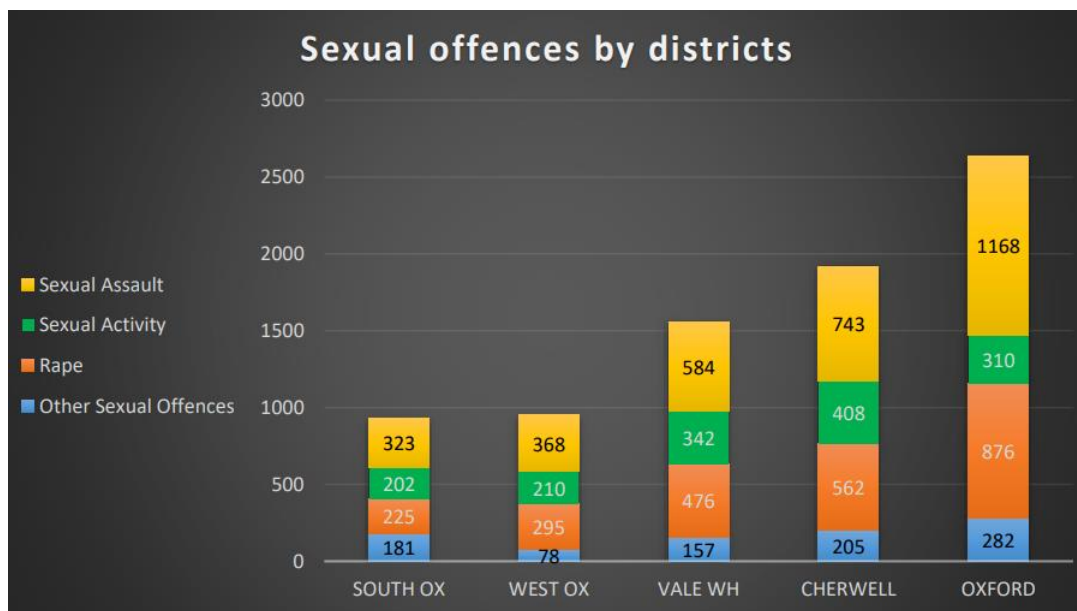


Figure 31 Sexual offences by districts (2018-2023)

11.9 Nearly two-thirds of serious violence occurred in the two most urbanised districts. The % decrease in SV has been evenly spread across the district, though the districts with most SV have seen the biggest numeric falls.

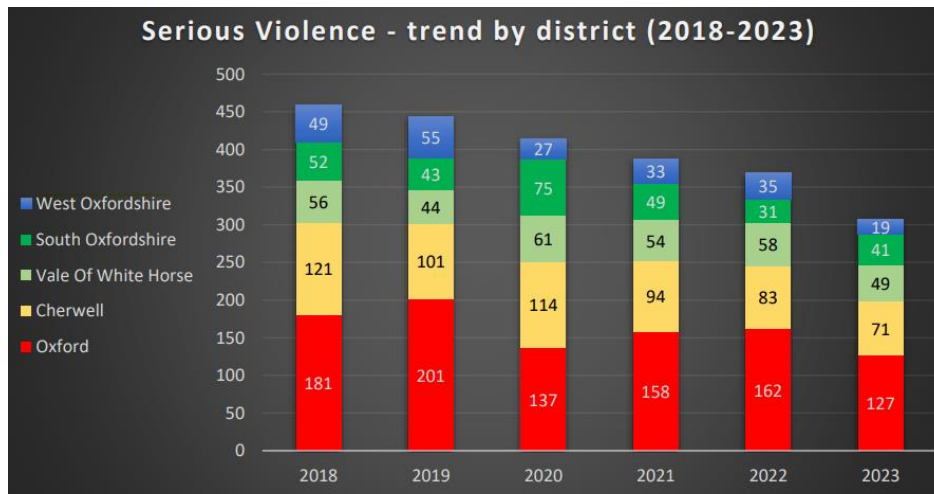


Figure 58 Serious violence – trend by district (2018-2023)

- 11.10 Police data for Anti-social behaviour only goes back as far as 2022. The number of recorded ASB occurrences has decreased from 2022 to 2023. Across Oxfordshire the bulk of ASB is community related (72%) with personal ASB being 19% and Environmental 9%. Community related ASB relates to noise and nuisance issues. Environmental involves fly tipping, littering and vandalism. Personal involves intimidation and harassment.

ASB - % decrease	
ASB - Community	7.38%
ASB - Environmental	39.26%
ASB - Personal	13.82%
Total	11.18%

Table 25 ASB % decrease (2022 & 2023)

- 11.11 There has been a decrease in ASB across all types. The decrease in environmental ASB is greatest in terms of % while community ASB is greatest in terms of absolute numbers. With just two years data it is very difficult to determine trends but in future years this will be possible.

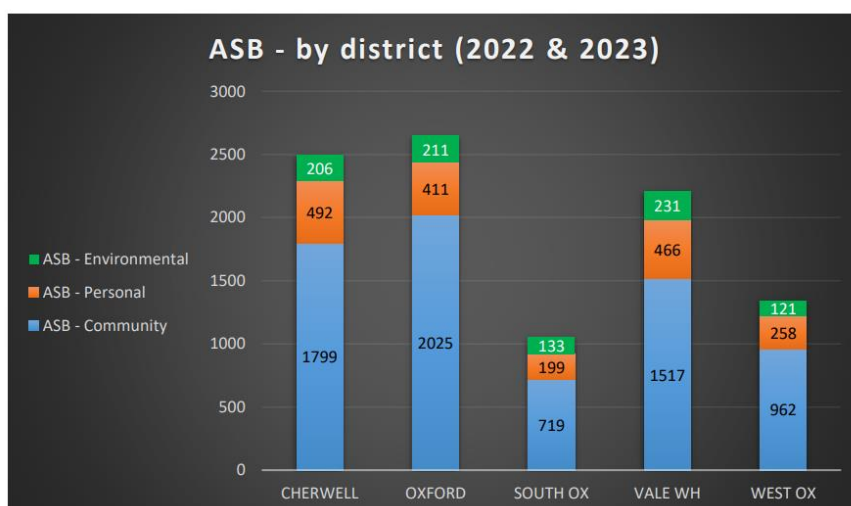


Figure 47 ASB by district (2022 & 2023)

- 11.12 The West Oxfordshire CSP will meet in June to renew the rolling action plan, taking into account the data above and any more immediate insights from partners. It is not envisaged that the partnership will make any changes to the 7 priorities set out above.
- 11.13 It is our understanding that TVP intends to include a sharp focus on Anti-social behaviour in their work in the coming year. The JATAC will continue to operate to support this. A new subgroup of the CSP has been established to focus on this topic and ensure we work together with best effect.
- 11.14 The new Youth Development Officer will be enabling greater partnership working with other agencies and groups, actively pursuing the development of opportunities for young people and engaging in conversations related to ASB, Exploitation and Serious Violence.
- 11.15 Given the success of the Rural Crime project the CSP is optimistic that further funding can be forthcoming to build on the project and retain a focus on the rural community and rural crime. It is the intention to pick up the findings of the Rural Crime survey within this work.
- 11.16 Additionally, the partnership will continue to highlight the need to recognise and support Domestic Abuse victim/survivors living rurally, undertake some research into the experience of victim/survivors living locally and review the recent Night time Safety Survey results, taking the necessary actions where resources permit.

12. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 12.1 This is not considered relevant for this report.

13. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1 There are no financial implication arising from this report.

14. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1 There are no legal implications arising from this report.

15. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 15.1 This report is for information only.

16. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 16.1 This report is for information only.

17. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS


- 17.1 This report is for information only.

18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 18.1 None.

(END)

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 WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL	WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL
Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 APRIL 2025
Subject	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY SELF-ASSESSMENT
Wards affected	None
Accountable member	Councillor Andrew Beaney, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Email: Andrew.beaney@westoxon.gov.uk
Accountable officer	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Report author	Ana Prelici, Senior Democratic Services Officer Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk
Summary/Purpose	To present the findings of a self-assessment survey carried out to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition from a structure of three overview and scrutiny committees to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
Annexes	Annex A – Survey Results Annex B – Meeting Attendance
Recommendation(s)	That Overview and Scrutiny resolves to: <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Note the report and the recommendation from the Constitution Working Group to the annual meeting of full Council on 21 May 2025 to reduce the Committee’s size to 15 members. 2. Endorse the Officer suggestions for improvement based on the survey feedback and agree any additional improvements.
Corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO

Consultees/ Consultation	Management team Constitution Working Group
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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report presents the findings of a self-assessment survey conducted to evaluate the effectiveness of the transition from three Overview and Scrutiny Committees to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee. It also identifies areas for further improvements.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Councils that operate executive arrangements are required to have at least one overview and scrutiny committee. Overview and scrutiny committees are empowered to review and scrutinise decisions taken by the Council and to investigate and make reports on any matters which affect the district or its inhabitants. The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Rules (Constitution Part 5C) state that:

Scrutiny Committees should not be regarded primarily as an "appeals mechanism" to overturn or amend specific decisions (although they may, if they see fit, ask the Executive, the Council or another Committee to reconsider a decision); rather their function is to raise issues for consideration, to examine the intent and effectiveness of policy, to hold the Executive to account, and to represent the interests and views of the public within the Council.

- 2.2** In November 2023, Full Council resolved to replace the three previous Overview and Scrutiny Committees (Climate and Environment, Economic and Social, Finance and Management) with a single committee. The aim of this change was to properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Executive decision-making process; ensure effective scheduling of meetings; and to facilitate effective work planning and improve efficiency (e.g. by reducing duplication).
- 2.3** Members and Officers were surveyed to assess the effectiveness of the move to a single committee and identify future improvements to the function.

3. SURVEY APPROACH AND RATIONALE

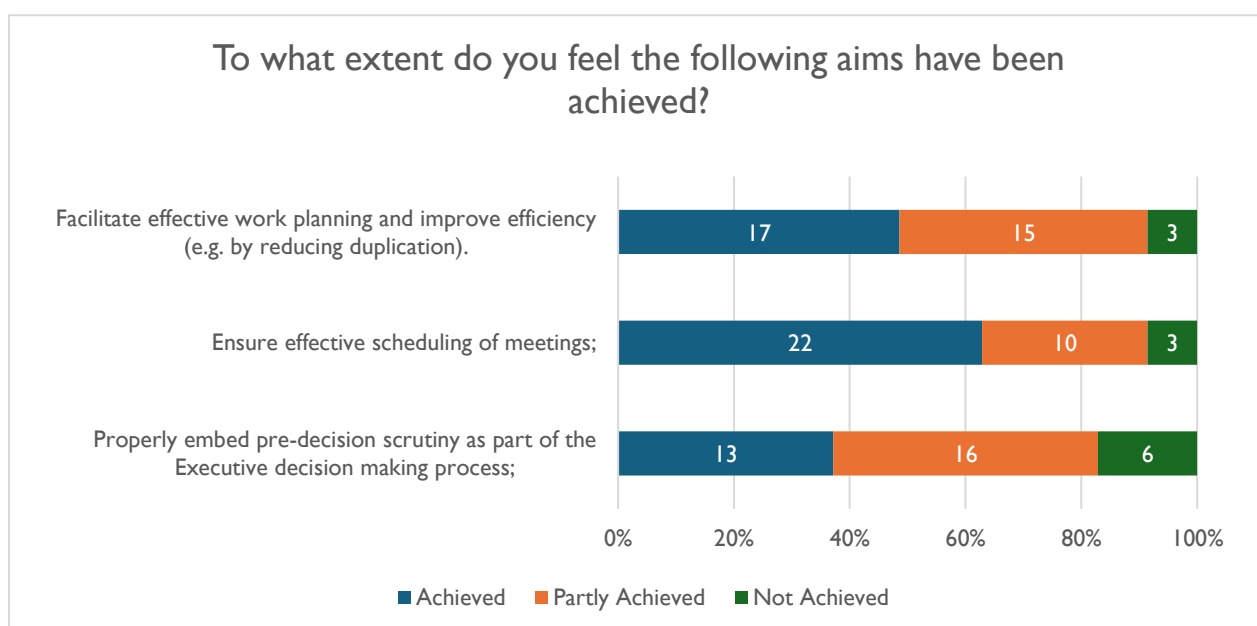
- 3.1** A questionnaire was sent out to all members of the Council, as well as Directors, Heads of Service and officers with experience of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at West Oxfordshire District Council. The questions asked within the survey are at Annex A and were partially based on the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's characteristics of effective scrutiny. The questionnaire also included questions aimed at seeking general views on the effectiveness of the Committee.

4. SURVEY RESULTS

- 4.1** The survey was completed by 35 respondents, of whom 23 were Councillors (14 Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, 5 Executive Members and 4 other Councillors) and 12 were Officers. Below is a summary of the results of the survey, the full results can be found at Annex A.

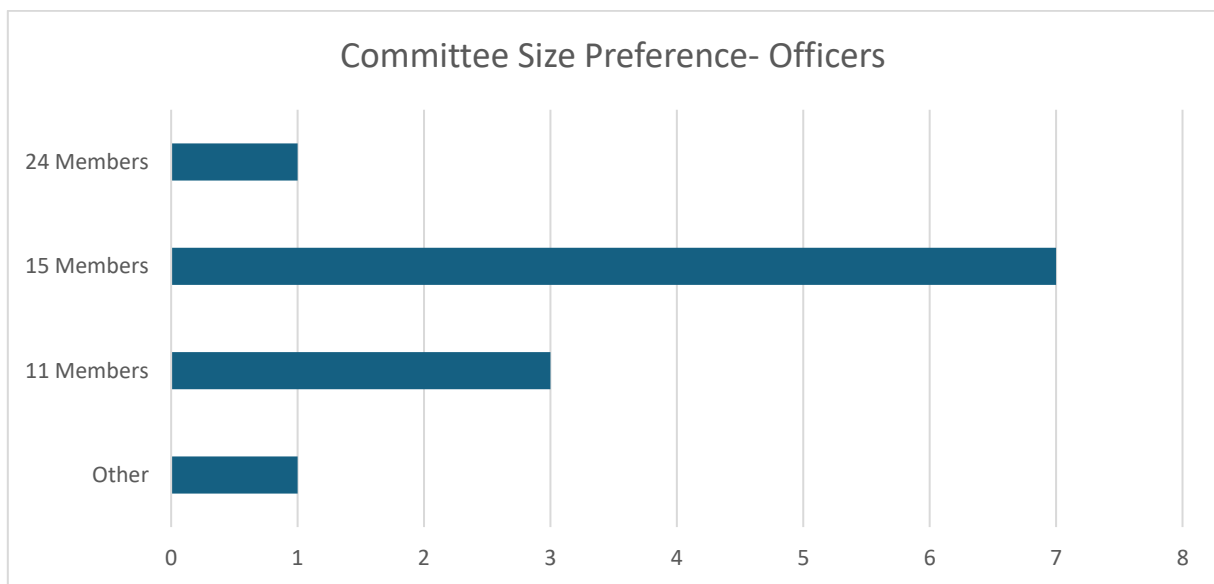
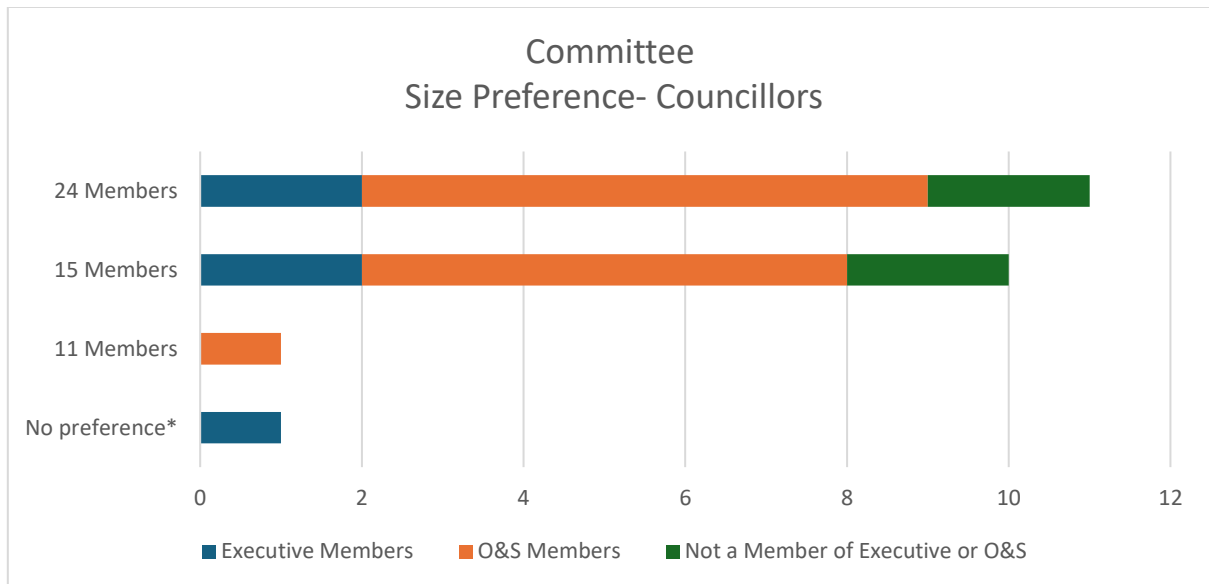
4.2 To assess whether or not the move to a single committee had been successful, respondents were asked to reflect on the original aims of this change. Out of 35 respondents, most felt that the aims of moving to a single committee had been achieved or partially achieved:

- Properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Executive decision-making process; 83% felt that the move to a single committee had either partially or fully achieved this.
- Ensure effective scheduling of meetings; 91% felt that the move to a single committee had either partially or fully achieved this.
- Facilitate effective work planning and improve efficiency (e.g. by reducing duplication); 91% felt that the move to a single committee had either partially or fully achieved this



4.3 The current membership of the Committee is 24 members, which is significantly above average for an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Respondents to the survey were asked to rate the optimum size of the Committee, between a choice of 11 members, 15 members, 24 members or 'other'.¹

¹ The 'other' option was a free text box. One Councillor responded to say "either version can work" and one officer answered to say "small and topic dependent" the graphs on the next page vary for this reason.



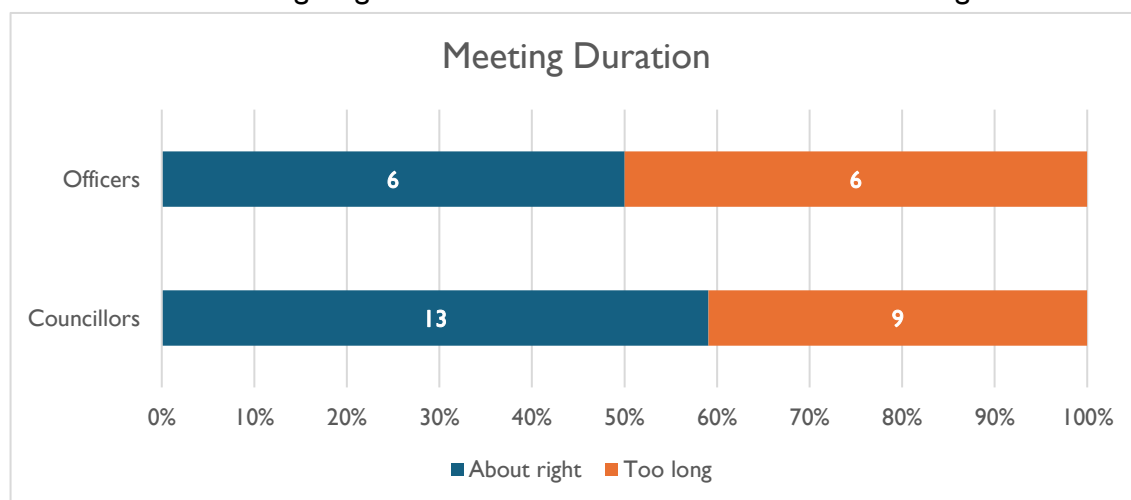
- 4.3.1** Most officers who responded to the survey preferred a smaller committee, with 58% answering that 15 members was the optimum size, and 25% officers answering that 11 members was the optimum size. 18% (one officer) preferred the existing size of 24 members, and 18% (one officer) answered “other” as detailed in the annex.
- 4.3.2** There was no overall preference between the existing committee and a smaller committee size from members who responded to the survey. 48% of members (11 members) who responded preferring the existing size of 24 members, 43% of members (10 members) preferring a reduced size of 15 members, and one member (4%) preferring a reduced size of 11 members.
- 4.3.3** Members and officers were asked to reflect on the answers they provided above and explain why they would prefer a smaller or larger committee. Reasons for maintaining the committee size that were given by respondents included that a larger committee allowed more members to participate and allowed for more expertise and a range of viewpoints

on the Committee. Reasons that were raised for reducing the size of the Committee included that the Committee at its current size was too large for effective participation and discussion, and that this meant that only a small number of members were engaged at meetings. In the view of some respondents, a smaller committee would also be easier to administer and make it easier for members to attend (as some felt their schedule was stretched) and find substitute members.

4.4 The average duration of Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings was 1 hour and 55 minutes. Respondents were asked to state whether this duration was too short, too long or about right. 57% of Members thought that meetings were about the right length while 39% thought they were too long. 50% of Officers who responded to the survey thought the duration of the meetings was too long, while 50% thought this was about right.

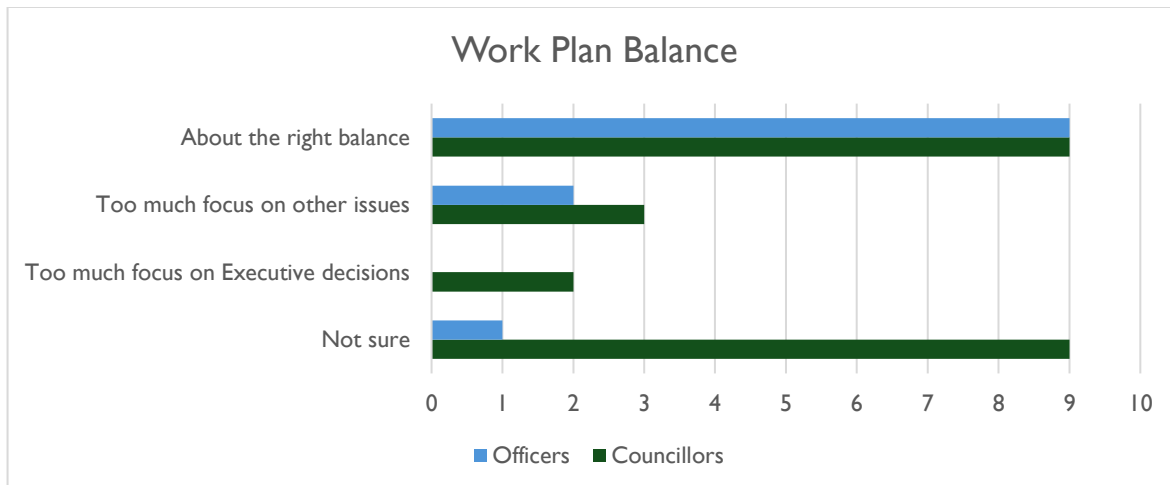
4.4.1 Respondents were asked to comment on the length of meetings. Neither members nor officers raised major concerns about the duration of meetings, but it was felt that extending the meetings past the average of two hours was not necessary and reduced the quality of meeting. Full responses and a summary are provided at Annex A.

4.4.2 The maximum meeting length in the Council's Constitution limits meetings to three hours.



4.5 Respondents were asked which layout they preferred for meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Most members (52%) and some officers (25%) did not have a preference, but of the remaining members and officers, there was a preference for a board room style layout in the committee rooms.

4.6 Respondents were asked whether the work plan achieved the right balance between focusing on pre-decision scrutiny of Executive decisions and other issues which are important to members and the district. A number of members were uncertain but most members and officers who responded stated that the work plan achieved largely the right balance. In the further comments section, it was suggested that the Committee should be more proactive in identifying other issues and fitting these around pre-decision scrutiny.



- 4.6.1** One member suggested that members of the Committee could benefit from further training, to better understand the Committee’s function in holding the Executive to account as a critical friend, and in particular the link between the Executive’s Forward Plan and the Committee’s work plan.
- 4.6.2** It was also stated that officer-led, PowerPoint-based presentations were not the best use of the Committee’s time as there was a limited amount to scrutinise on these.
- 4.6.3** There were some comments stating that the previous way of operating the Committee (i.e. three committees) was better, though the responses in 4.2 indicated that most respondents felt that the move to a single committee has at least partially achieved the intended aims.
- 4.6.4** It was suggested that task and finish groups could be greater utilised by the Committee as this could allow the Committee to scrutinise topics in depth without extending the length of Committee meetings.
- 4.7** Respondents were asked to rate whether or not they agree that the Committee achieves the following, based on the characteristics for Effective Scrutiny from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny;
- Has a clearly defined and valued role in the Council’s governance arrangements
 - Operates non-politically
 - Committee Members have the training and development opportunities they need
 - Receives high quality information and reports from officers
 - Holds Executive Members to account
 - Holds Senior Officers to account
 - Encourages public participation
 - Builds trust and good relationships with internal and external stakeholders.
- 4.7.2** Generally, most respondents agreed with the statements that the Committee “has a clearly defined role and valued role in the Council’s governance arrangements”, “receives

high quality information and reports from officers”, and that “meetings and activities are well planned.”

- 4.7.3 Officers largely agreed that most of the criteria above were largely being met, with the exception that “Committee Members have the training and development opportunities needed”, and that “the Committee operates non-politically” which were identified as areas for improvement.
- 4.7.4 The areas for improvement identified from Councillor responses were “Encourages public participation”, “holds Senior Officers to account”, “holds Executive Members to account”, as well as the two criteria also raised by the officer responses as above - “Committee Members have the training and development opportunities needed” and “the Committee operates non-politically”.
- 4.7.5 Further feedback provided on these characteristics also identified that more training was needed, especially for new Councillors. There were concerns raised about presentation-based items, which limited the Committee’s available time available to scrutinise issues, as well as difficulty scrutinising the impact of policies without measurable outcomes. It was also considered that Executive Members could play a more prominent role at meetings.
- 4.7.6 One member raised that the meeting time could be reviewed, a 5:30pm start time made it difficult for them to attend meetings.
- 4.8 A box was also provided for respondents to provide any other suggestions for improvement. Key themes highlighted include better utilisation of work planning sessions, more training, and greater use of task and finish groups.
- 4.9 One officer described the atmosphere at committee meetings as ‘unpleasant’. While it is not clear how widespread this experience is, the Committee should be mindful that more junior report authors are not made to feel ‘put on the spot’, focussing on scrutinising the decisions of the Executive and senior officers. This is something that could also potentially be dealt with through further training.

5. FEEDBACK FROM THE CONSTITUTION WORKING GROUP

- 5.1 The Constitution Working Group considered an earlier version of this report on 26 March 2025, and prompted by the suggestion to do so within the report looked at the following issues;
 - 5.1.1 **Reduce the size of the Committee**
 - 5.1.2 The survey results showed that 50% of members and 82% of Officers supported reducing the Committee’s size. This was discussed by the CWG, who agreed unanimously that the Committee size should be reduced to 15 members for the following reasons;
 - i. A smaller Committee would make it easier for members to find substitutes, and for officers to administer.
 - ii. The CWG agreed with the observation raised in the survey that the Committee’s size was not conducive to inclusive discussions, and did not enable all members to participate to the extent that they might wish to.

- iii. A smaller Committee would lead to a loss of expertise on the Committee itself, but this could be mitigated through the greater use of task and finish groups. Task and finish groups would be required to regularly report to the Committee. Unlike a sub-committee, the members of task and finish groups would not need to sit on the 'parent' committee, so long as its Chair is on the Committee (to provide a clear reporting line and accountability). The greater use of task and finish groups would provide a way for more of the Council's members to participate in scrutiny activities if they wish to.

- 5.1.3 The size of 15 members was agreed by the CWG as it was the more popular choice with survey respondents who preferred a smaller committee. It was felt 11 members would be too small.

The CWG resolved to recommend to Full Council that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee be reduced to 15 members.

5.2 Returning to a three-committee structure

- 5.2.1 Several members commented that the single Overview and Scrutiny Committee does not operate as effectively as the three committees it replaced. The responses in the survey largely indicated that the move to a single Committee has at least partially achieved the intended aims. While further work is needed in some areas, for instance in ensuring that Executive Members are more accountable to the Committee (as opposed to officers being held to account), and that there is greater input from Committee Members in work planning, suggestions below should help address concerns with the single Committee.
- 5.2.2 The CWG considered the option of returning to a three-committee structure but did not think it would be preferable to do this, instead favouring improvements to the single-committee model. The CWG considered that a greater use of task and finish groups would allow the Scrutiny function to look at issues in more depth but that the membership of these could be expertise-based and flexible.

5.3 Training

- 5.4 The CWG also endorsed the officer recommendation for further training (6.2).

6. OFFICER SUGGESTIONS FOR IMPROVING EFFECTIVENESS OF THE COMMITTEE

- 6.1 The following improvements could be implemented by Officers or by Officers with the agreement of the Committee.

6.2 Training

- 6.2.1 Further training for Committee Members will be organised in response to the need for this that was raised by several respondents to the survey.
- 6.2.2 The Council has previously used the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny to provide Scrutiny Essentials training. That session was well received but was poorly attended and there has been a significant turnover of Members since scrutiny training was last offered. This year it is intended to offer Scrutiny Essentials training followed separately by Questioning Skills training.

6.3 Work Planning

- 6.3.1** One of the issues highlighted was that although there is a reasonably good balance between pre-decision scrutiny items and other important issues, members do not feel that they have an ability to feed into the Committee's work plan. The Committee's work plan is reviewed at every meeting but normally towards the end of the meeting without much detailed discussion. A work planning session, involving the Committee Members, key officers and Executive Members has been scheduled for the April Committee meeting.
- 6.3.2** Officers will present a suggested work plan, including suggested task and finish groups, to the 16 April 2025 meeting but there is scope for the Committee's Members to take advice from officers and identify areas of importance to them and to add or remove items. In doing so the Committee is advised to have regard to the TOPIC criteria (timely, organisational priority, public interest, influence, cost).
- 6.3.3** Officers would recommend that members leave some capacity on the work plan to allow the ability to look at new issues as and when they arise throughout the year.

6.4 Greater use of task and finish groups

- 6.4.1** Several suggestions were made about increasing the use of task and finish groups. The Committee could review areas that it wishes to focus on and consider any task and finish groups (also known as review groups or working groups) that it wishes to establish.
- 6.4.2** To encourage the implementation of task and finish groups and to ensure that they feed back to the main Committee, it would be good practice for a standing item to be added to Committee agendas for updates from task and finish groups.

6.5 Discouraging the use of officer-led, slideshow-based presentations

- 6.5.1** There were references to the use of officer-led, slideshow-based presentations which members felt did not enable discussion or effective scrutiny, particularly where the content is not made available in advance. Democratic Services will liaise with officers to continue to discourage the use of presentations at Committee meetings for items which would be better delivered as member briefings instead.

6.6 Encouraging Executive Members to present items

- 6.6.1** Executive Members have been encouraged to present items and this should continue.
- 6.6.2** Improved engagement between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committee could also be encouraged by holding regular meetings between the Leader and the Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
- 6.6.3** The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Rules (Constitution Part 5C) state that the Committee will "receive reports from the Leader at its first meeting after each annual Council meeting on the Executive's priorities for the coming year and its performance in the previous year". This will assist the Committee with holding the Executive to account and help to foster a more productive relationship between Scrutiny and the Executive.

7. FURTHER OPTION

7.1 Change the meeting time

- 7.1.1** It was suggested by one member that the meeting start time of 5:30pm is not working but it is unclear how widespread this opinion is. The Council Procedure Rules (Constitution Part 5A) provide that “the timing of meetings will be agreed by the respective Council Committees and Sub-Committees at their first meeting of the civic year”.

8. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 8.1** This report sets out a number of options for improving or changing the Council’s Overview and Scrutiny Committee for consideration by Members.
- 8.2** Doing nothing is not recommended given that the survey has provided lots of feedback and ideas and the Council should seek to continuously improve how it operated.

9. CONCLUSIONS

- 9.1** The survey results show that the Committee is overall functioning effectively but that further improvements could be made in ensuring that Executive Members lead on items and reducing the role of officers in presenting items.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1** There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report. The planned scrutiny training can be funded from the existing budget for member training.

11. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** The Council operates executive arrangements and as such must have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Local Government Act 2000 provides the statutory basis for overview and scrutiny committees and their powers.

12. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 12.1** There are no significant risks arising from this report.

13. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 13.1** There are no differential impacts on groups with protected characteristics.

14. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 14.1** A smaller committee would reduce the emissions from members travelling for in-person meetings, but this is likely to be negligible.

15. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

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ANNEX A- SURVEY RESULTS

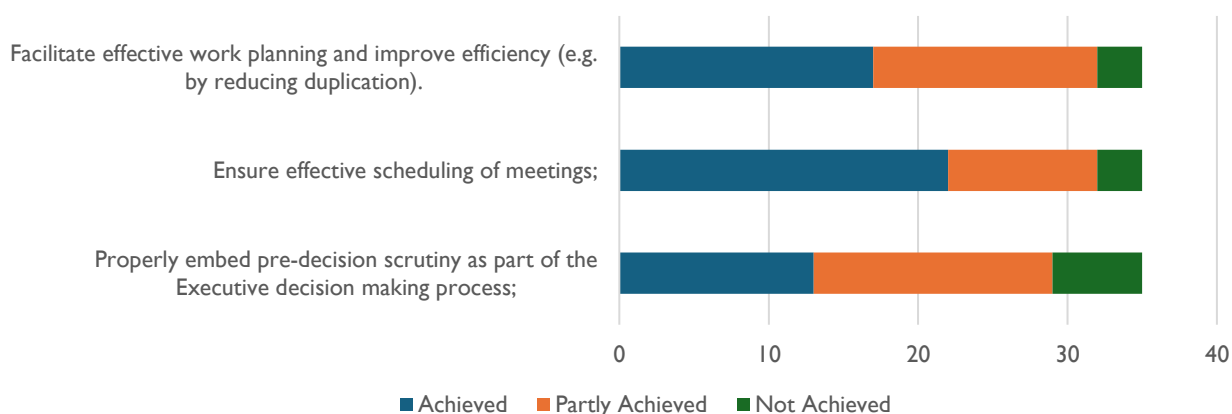
1. Please select which of the following best applies to you

	Number of respondents
Officer	12
Councillor – Overview and Scrutiny Committee Member	14
Councillor – Executive Member	5
Councillor – Not a member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Executive	4

2. To what extent do you feel that the move to a single Overview and Scrutiny Committee has achieved each of the following aims?

	Achieved	Partly Achieved	Not Achieved
Properly embed pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Executive decision-making process;	13	16	6
Ensure effective scheduling of meetings;	22	10	3
Facilitate effective work planning and improve efficiency (e.g. by reducing duplication).	17	15	3

To what extent do you feel the following aims have been achieved?



3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee currently has 24 Members. In your view what would be the optimum size for the Committee?

Committee Size Preference - Councillors

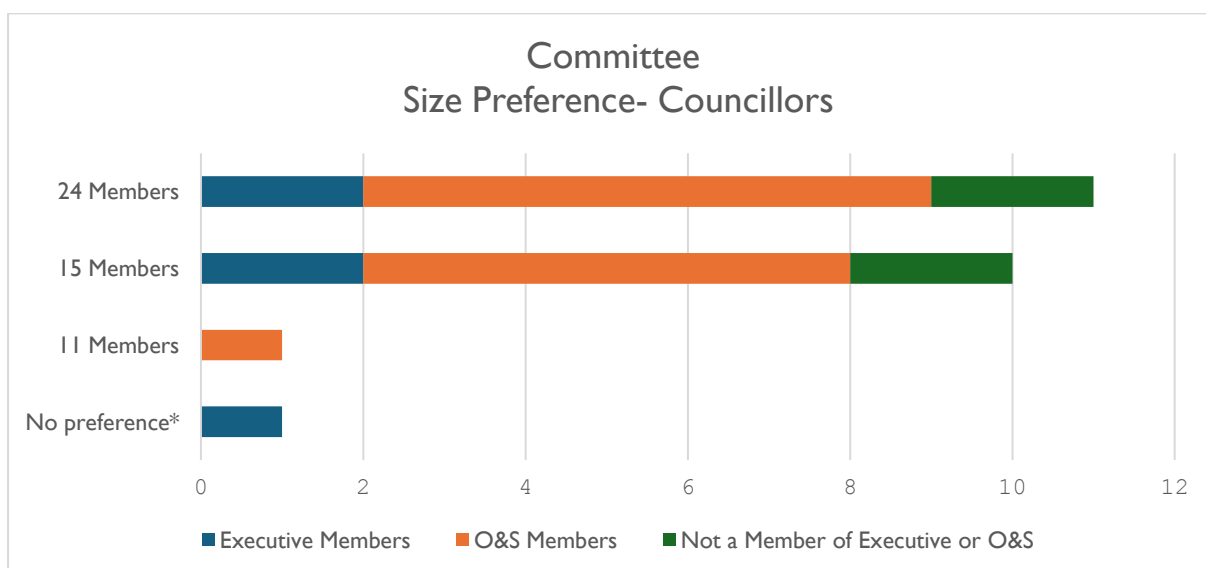
	No preference*	11 Members	15 Members	24 Members
Executive Members	1	0	2	2
O&S Members	0	1	6	7
Not a Member of Executive or O&S	0	0	2	2
All Councillors (total)	1	1	10	11
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>4%</i>	<i>43%</i>	<i>48%</i>

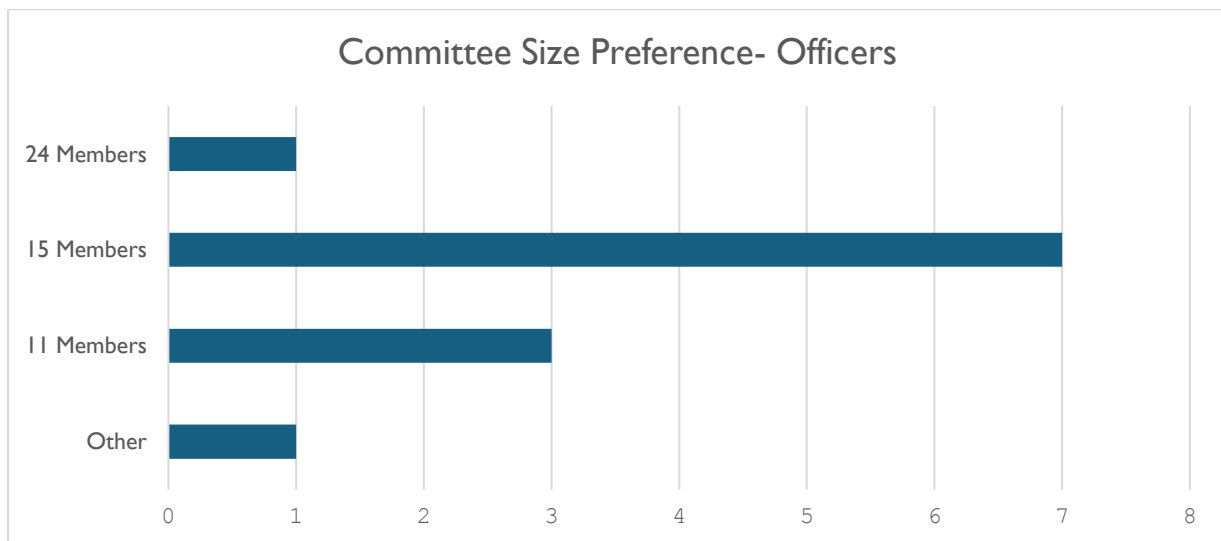
Committee Size Preference - Officers

	Other†	11 Members	15 Members	24 Members
Officers	1	3	7	1
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>25%</i>	<i>58%</i>	<i>8%</i>

*answered “either number can work - depending on chairing and maximum time allowances for speaking”

†answered “small and dependent on subject”





4. Please provide any further information explaining why you think the Committee's size of 24 Members is or isn't suitable.

ChatGPT Summary

Concerns About the Current Size (24 Members):

- Too large for effective discussion – A high number of members results in long meetings, repetition, and a lack of in-depth scrutiny.
- Challenging to Chair – Managing discussions and ensuring all members contribute meaningfully is difficult.
- Limited engagement from all members – Often, only a core group actively participate, suggesting a smaller committee could be more effective.
- Overlapping viewpoints and inefficiency – Too many differing opinions can prolong discussions unnecessarily, making meetings less productive.
- Overstretching councillors – Many members are already serving on multiple committees, making it difficult to attend and engage fully.

Arguments for Maintaining a Larger Committee:

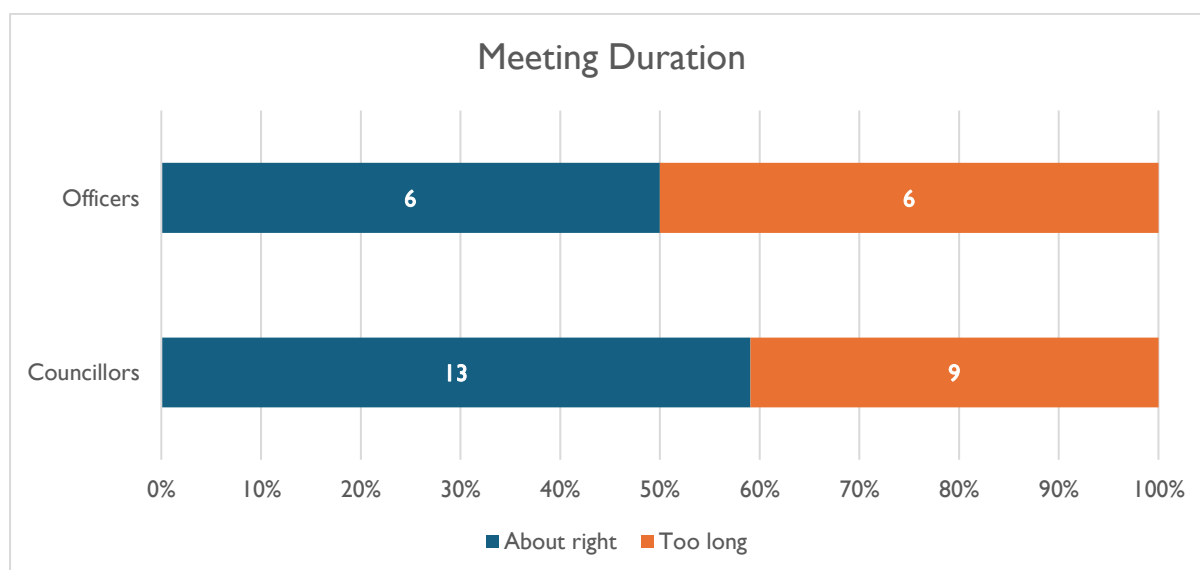
- Diverse perspectives – A broad membership ensures a range of views and expertise, which strengthens scrutiny.
- Wide scope of work – The Committee covers various subjects, requiring sufficient representation to provide meaningful oversight.
- Councillor engagement – For many members, this is their primary way to understand and contribute to Council matters.

	Responses
Councillor	too big for a conversation with too many members
Officer	15 Members would be optimal as any further members would not provide added value.
Officer	24 is far too large for a Committee. It doesn't provide enough opportunity for all members to contribute in depth without meetings taking far too long. It is also challenging to Chair such a large Committee. A smaller size would provide for more focused scrutiny.
Councillor	If you had fewer, you would lose expertise. For many councillors, Overview & Scrutiny is their main channel both for learning about what is going on, and for inputting their ideas.
Councillor	I wasn't a councillor until last year, so I don't have anything else to compare with.
Officer	Committee size should be dependent on subject, and small so that Members can have a round table discussion with the Executive and officers.
Officer	A smaller number would facilitate the ability for all members of the committee to have the ability to contribute
Officer	In my experience, a number of Members do not raise issues or questions during meetings and it tends to be the same core of Members that do. This suggests that the number sitting on the committee could be reduced. It would also ensure the meetings remain focused.
Officer	Sometimes there are too many view points
Councillor	Too many people there not doing much
Councillor	I personally think that 24 members are to bigger group
Councillor	Allows groups to nominate specialist to consider particular subjects
Councillor	Allows a wider range of councillors to be included in the governance of the District
Councillor	24 seems to be simply more than necessary. Councillors are somewhat stretched on other committees. I have subbed regularly for the O and S , despite being on Uplands , Licensing and Audit and Governance
Councillor	To many voices trying to politicise rather than scrutinise
Councillor	The number of members at the meeting is not a problem, it is what happens in the meeting that is a real issue.
Councillor	I am a relatively new councillor but feel that the committee achieves its objectives effectively as it is.
Councillor	Smaller number is probably easier to administer for, but larger number can also work if limits on speaking rights etc.
Councillor	It is too large to allow for effective debate and scrutiny.
Councillor	There are too many people. Some people there do not greatly contribute. A more focussed group might be more effective, although political groups will still be able to nominate people who don't do much.
Councillor	It does seem very large - half the Council. Can be difficult to get subs.. But due to the range of subjects covered it is probably useful to have quite a large committee.
Councillor	Just far too many members so items can go on for far longer than needed
Councillor	Given the range of topics presented to the Committee to review I feel it would be a stretch to cover these with say 15 members and the breadth of views and background brought to bear in discussion is appreciated. This breadth should be seen as a valuable counterbalance to the relatively

	narrow perspective of the Executive. A large Committee means lengthy discussions though. Personally I think a Committee of say 20 would be the right size.
Councillor	All 24 Cllrs trying to have an opinion on any subject matters means lot of repetition and can cause the meeting to be longer than necessary
Officer	It is too many for a discussion with so many differing opinions and objectives.
Councillor	The more members there are, the less we achieve as everyone wants to have their say and frequently repeat each other.
Councillor	I think it has a diverse number of Councillors so we get varied opinions and ensures good discussion and scrutiny on important topics.
Councillor	The committee is set-up to 'scrutinise' the Executive. If this function is NOT going to be performed by the Full Council then the O&S needs to be of a size that delivers effective scrutiny. Hence 24 members, half the size of the FC seems about right.
Councillor	It is too large to allow for effective debate and scrutiny.
Councillor	There are too many people. Some people there do not greatly contribute. A more focussed group might be more effective, although political groups will still be able to nominate people who don't do much.
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Councillor	Just far too many members so items can go on for far longer than needed
Officer	
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Councillor	All 24 Cllrs trying to have an opinion on any subject matters means lot of repetition and can cause the meeting to be longer than necessary

5. The average length of an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting has been 1 hour and 55 minutes. Do you think length this is about right, too long, or too short?

	About right	Too long	Too short	Did not respond
Councillors	13	9	0	1
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>57%</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>4%</i>
Officers	6	6	0	0
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>50%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>0%</i>



6. Please provide any comments on the length of meetings

	Responses
Councillor	no more than 2 hrs some have been longer
Officer	Length of meetings are fine, it would be great if the chairing could be firmer so only questions which are on topic are accepted.
Officer	When meetings go on beyond 2 1/2 hours the quality starts to deteriorate.
Councillor	Ideally meetings should last no longer than 90 minutes. Written comments sent in advance might help reduce the length of meetings.
Officer	Length of discussion should be dependent on subject complexity and impact of decision.
Officer	1.5 hrs is optimum
Officer	But does depend on agenda items
Councillor	We are given long presentations which are then just for noting, items given already done and approved by exec making the meeting points pointless. I am happy with a long meeting if it's effective and they haven't been
Councillor	1 hour if we reverted back to old way of doing scrutiny
Councillor	If meetings are too long, this interferes with councillors attending evening parish meetings

Councillor	Meetings need to be as long as there are things to discuss ...within reason , of course.
Councillor	Fewer members would enable robust effective scrutiny.....currently a committee full of sound bites
Councillor	<p>The length of meetings at O&S vary. I don't mind attending a meeting that has a long duration as long as the meeting is actually useful. Since this new meeting structure has been in situ, the committee has rarely scrutinised or recommended anything practical to the Executive.</p> <p>More often than not, some of the presentations by Officers are useful, but as there are not any recommendations associated with the reports, some members take use this meeting as an opportunity for questions and answers.</p> <p>A month ago, there was a useful presentation on housing. But that's all it was, a useful presentation - Overview and Scrutiny was not the right place for that to go. The same as the S106 presentation a few months ago. I would argue that most presentations that Officers give at these meetings are useful, but they should be members briefings because nothing is actually achieved in these meetings.</p>
Councillor	Depends on the size, depth and number of reports/items being scrutinised.
Officer	Long meetings are less accessible for residents and make it harder for them to engage with the democratic process
Councillor	<p>I suppose my concern over the length is that the first Wednesday of the month clashes with another meeting I ought to attend at 7.30 and that meeting is not in Witney.</p> <p>Also, if 1 hour 55 minutes is the AVERAGE length, this means some meetings are considerably longer and I think decision making gets a bit tired after two hours - or even before.</p>
Councillor	Meetings should aim to be over by 1 hour and 30 minutes
Officer	Almost 2 hours average makes for a long meeting but if the time is spend on the right issues it is worth it. It would be useful to focus time on more contentious matters and less on areas where the Committee can add little to the technical expertise of Officers (ie budget review).
Councillor	It will always depend on what's being discussed but 2hrs should be more than enough time
Officer	An hour if everyone has correctly read all the documentation and not asking questions to which the information is already in the papers.
Councillor	As above - too many members
Councillor	It seems some topics which have huge opinion and can split the room and could do with there own meeting...housing for example. However there was also a number of other topics to talk through and it became a very long and exhausting meeting.
Councillor	The meeting takes as long as it takes. The time should be dictated by the items needing to be scrutinised not by any arbitrary duration defined for whatever reason.

ChatGPT Summary

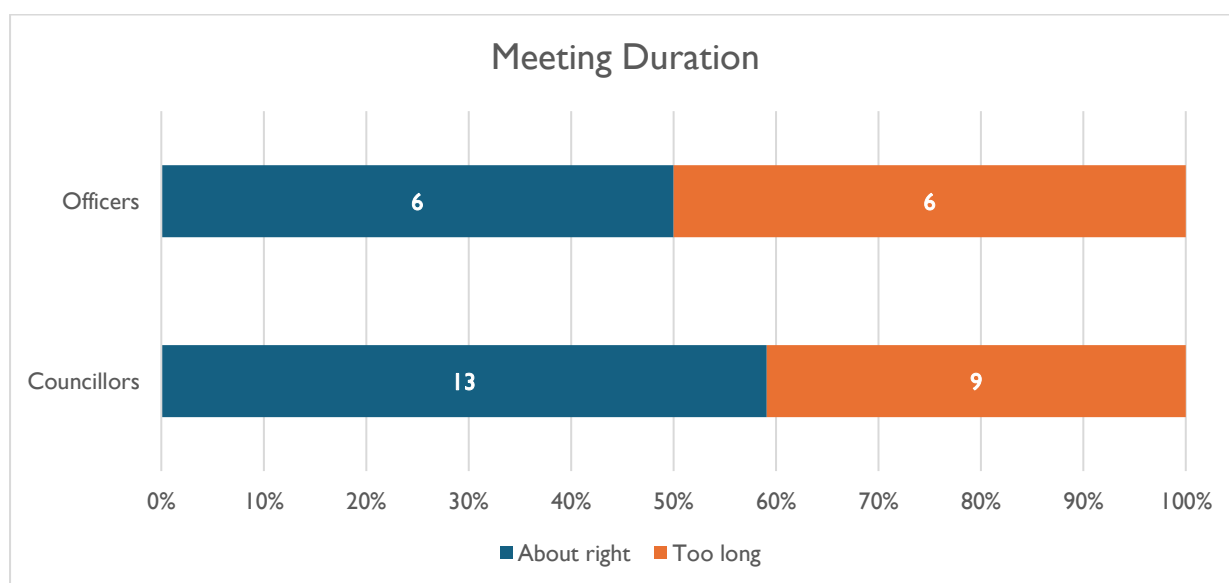
Generally Acceptable Duration: While the current average duration is reasonable, many members suggest that meetings should ideally not exceed 90 minutes to maintain focus and effectiveness. Meetings extending beyond 2 hours risk diminishing the quality of scrutiny and decision-making.

Effectiveness of Scrutiny: The length of discussions should be determined by the complexity and significance of the decisions being scrutinised. However, some agenda items, such as presentations that do not lead to recommendations, may not contribute meaningfully to the committee's role. Ensuring that meetings focus on decisions requiring scrutiny rather than informational updates could improve efficiency.

Opportunities for Improvement: Providing written comments in advance may help streamline discussions, reducing the time spent on areas where there is already consensus or where information has been sufficiently covered in documentation.

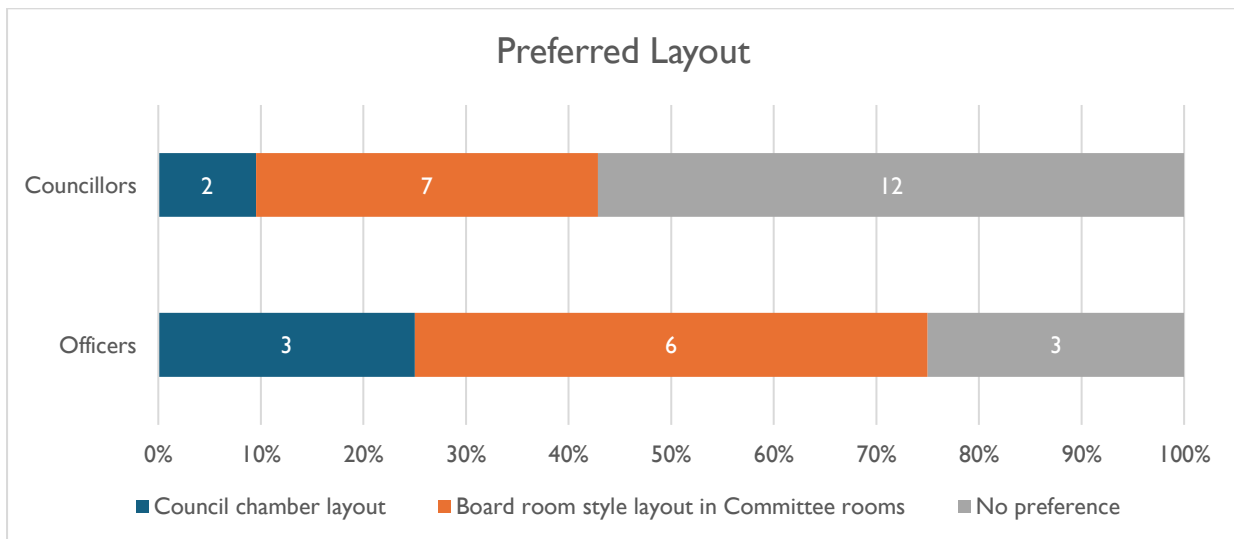
Impact on Accessibility and Participation: Longer meetings can discourage public engagement and create scheduling conflicts for councillors attending other meetings. Keeping meetings concise and purposeful would support broader participation in the scrutiny process.

Overall, while the current average meeting length is not excessive, there is scope to refine the structure of meetings to ensure they are as effective and focused as possible in fulfilling the committee's scrutiny role.

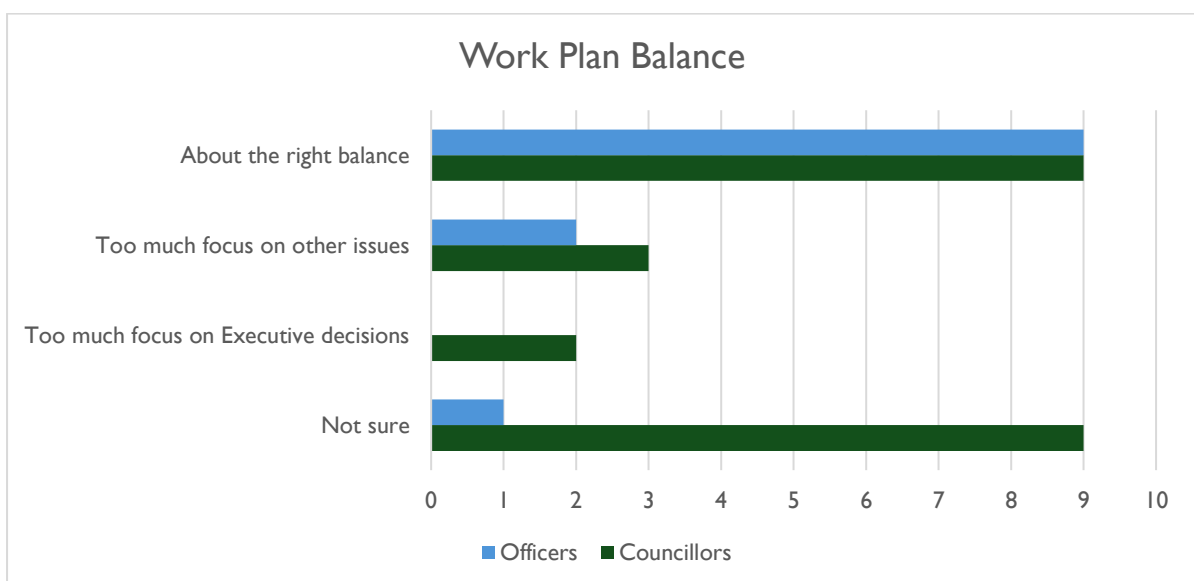


7. For Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings which layout do you think works best?

	Council chamber layout	Board room style layout in Committee rooms	No preference
Councillors	2	7	12
<i>as percentage</i>	9%	30%	52%
Officers	3	6	3
<i>as percentage</i>	25%	50%	25%



8. Do you agree that the Committee's work plan achieves the right balance between focusing on Executive decisions (pre-decision scrutiny) and other issues that are important to Members and the District?



	Not sure	Too much focus on Executive decisions	Too much focus on other issues	About the right balance
Councillors	9	2	3	9
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>39%</i>	<i>9%</i>	<i>13%</i>	<i>39%</i>
Officers	1	0	2	9
<i>As percentage</i>	<i>8%</i>	<i>0%</i>	<i>17%</i>	<i>75%</i>

9. Please provide any further comments on the work plan

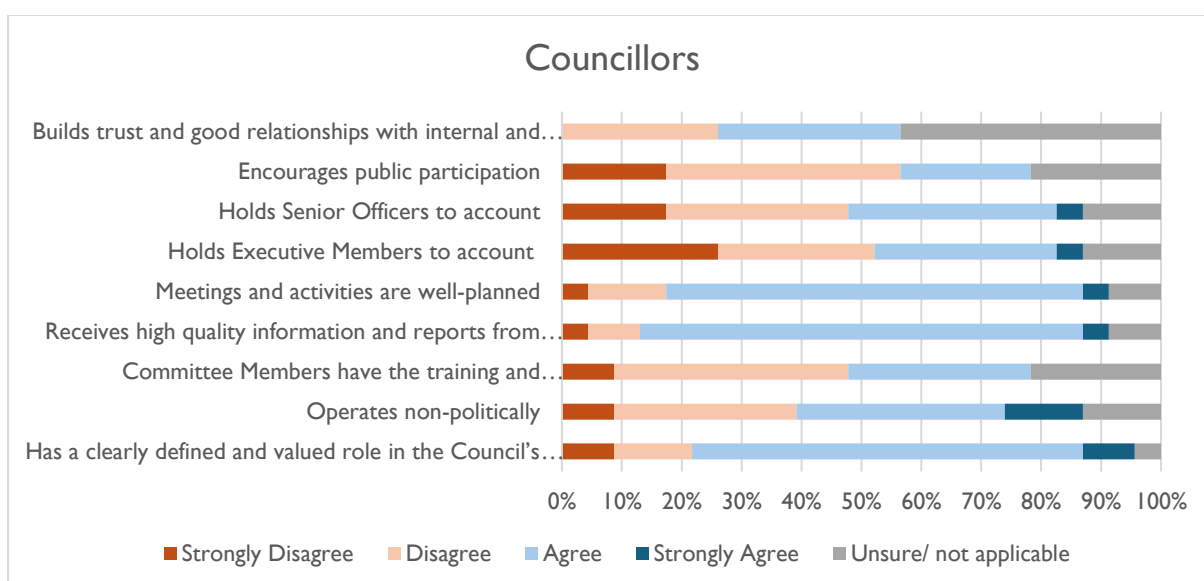
ChatGPT Summary

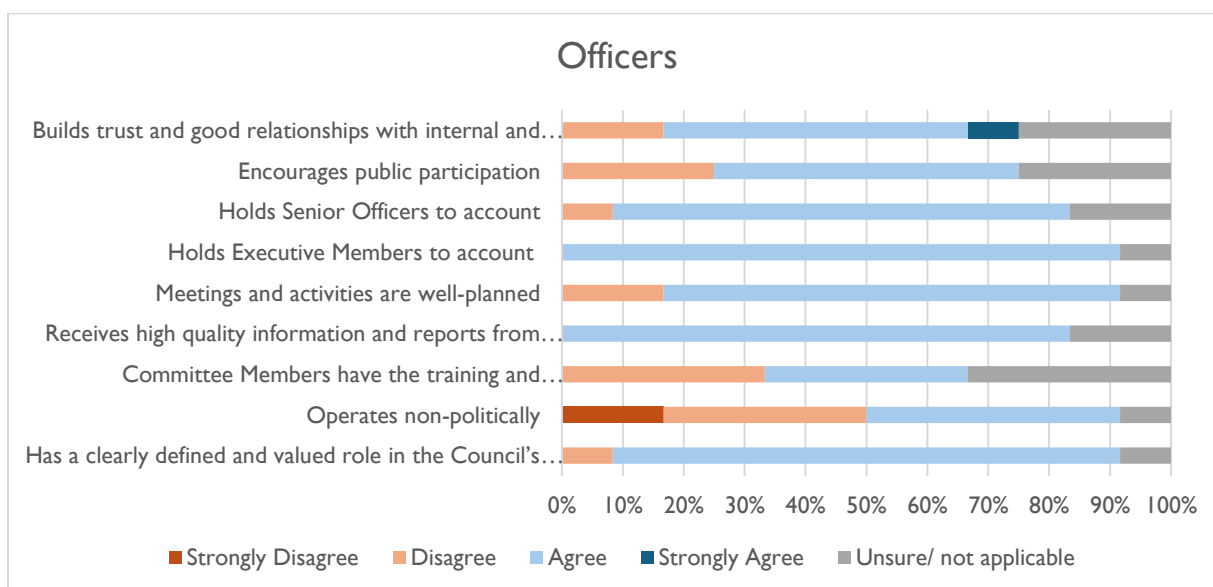
- **Focus on Policy and Decision-Making:** The work plan should prioritise issues that are policy-driven and directly linked to executive decisions. Some members feel that too many items lack relevance to pre-decision scrutiny and do not contribute meaningfully to holding the Executive to account.
- **Greater Strategic Planning:** Rather than a formulaic approach, the work plan could be structured around upcoming Executive decisions, with the committee proactively identifying key themes or issues for scrutiny. This would allow for a more strategic and targeted approach.
- **Use of Working Groups:** Expanding the use of working groups could facilitate in-depth discussions on important issues without significantly lengthening committee meetings. This would ensure a more balanced approach between pre-decision scrutiny and broader matters of interest to members and the district.
- **Improved Visibility and Understanding:** The work plan should be more visible to officers and better integrated with the Executive's forward plan. There is also a need for clearer guidance on how items are selected for scrutiny and how the committee's work aligns with Executive decision-making, particularly for new members.
- **Reducing Non-Scrutiny Items:** Some agenda items, such as presentations or guest speakers, are seen as informational rather than scrutiny-focused. Where appropriate, these could be shifted to member briefings to ensure that the committee's time is used effectively for scrutiny purposes.

Councillor	needs to take issues that are policy driven
Officer	The work plan was informed by the three Committees it replaced but with some items dealt with as member briefings instead. Then pre-decision Cabinet items have been added. I think the Committee could do with considering what issues it would be most useful to focus on going forwards, in addition to pre-decision scrutiny.
Officer	Work plan should be made more visible to officers.
Officer	There could be a greater use of working groups to allow in depth discussions on other issues important to Members and the District to ensure that meeting lengths are not dramatically increased resulting in a more equitable balance between pre-decision scrutiny and other issues.

Officer	If purpose is pre decision scrutiny, many papers that go to O&S have no link to an Executive decision.
Councillor	The items being brought before scrutiny are more often than not pointless no matter where they come from and things needing to be scrutinised have been and gone
Councillor	Revert back to previous way we did scrutiny
Councillor	Executive not being called to account !
Councillor	Overall, the Executive will do whatever they can to avoid scrutiny. It is convenient that potentially controversial topics which would originally be discussed before elections are ALWAYS moved until after an election. The slippery administration certainly won't change these committees now that they can get away with anything....
Councillor	Nil specific
Councillor	The work plan as presented is rather formulaic. I would prefer it to be presented more as what is coming up for the Executive and what we as a Committee might wish to examine outside of this in terms of themes or issues and then agree work programme priorities as a result.
Councillor	Many of the "other issues" have been power point presentations or officer/guests speakers, I understand the importance of these issues but these should be treated as all member briefings as we are not scrutinising them!
Councillor	I'd like to see more on housing and our associations as well as homelessness and our wdc estates. I don't think we're included in decisions enough and to ensure the the above topics are doing there best.
Councillor	There is not enough training about the connection between the O&S work plan and the Executive workplan. It is not clear how items are selected for scrutiny. It is also not clear what the objectives of the O&S meeting vs the Executive is. e.g. as a new Member of the O&S committee it took me at least 3 meetings to work out that there is a connection with the Exec Meeting.

10. Please state to what extent you agree or disagree with the following statements: at West Oxfordshire District Council, Overview and Scrutiny...





11. Please use the box below to provide any further feedback, reflecting on your responses to the characteristics above.

Officer	I think O&S is largely delivering against those characteristics although there is some room for improvement across the board, e.g. Executive Members could play a more prominent role at meetings, public participation is available but has been under-utilised, reports are general good although a few times officers have provided presentations instead, which doesn't lend itself to effective scrutiny (those things could be delivered as member briefings instead).
Councillor	If all our policies had measurable outcomes, it would be easier for Scrutiny to hold them to account.
Councillor	Training for new committee members should be provided.
Councillor	Not working
Councillor	There is not enough time between Executive meetings and Overview and Scrutiny for decisions to be securitised
Councillor	District and County Councils tend to be "Officer-led" therefore only a handful of people really make decisions, with the Executive walking around like pets on leads. They lap up the attention, but at the end of the day, they don't have the creative to even think about positive policy for the greater good of West Oxfordshire.
Councillor	Not quite sure how to answer some of these. We seem to be getting quite regular training sessions currently - this needs to continue. It is difficult to judge whether the committee works entirely unpolitically as I think a certain amount of pre-meeting takes place between members. Pre-meeting discussion is reasonable so members have a chance to develop a broader understanding of matters presented in the meeting provided members do not come mandated to take a particular line. I am not sure the public has yet grasped the important role of O&S and see it as giving opportunity to express their concerns etc..

Councillor	The O and S Committee is well chaired and is apolitical overall and encourages broad discussion but lacks weight as items progress to Executive and Council. A routine summary of key points raised and agreed by the Committee for each item and passed to the Executive would be helpful.
Councillor	The scrutiny committee should spend their meeting time scrutinising and not just listening to presentations we are currently not holding the exec to account
Councillor	I'd rather the meetings were not at 5.30pm. It's a difficult time for me and traffic is bad getting to the office.
Councillor	The O&S should have a clearly defined and valued role in the governance structure of the council and should be holding both the Exec and Officers to account, just not sure it is doing so at the moment.

12. What else do you think could be done to improve how the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Functions?


Councillor	more issues by ward or a collection of wards
Officer	1. Smaller committee size. 2. Better/increased use of task and finish groups. 3. An annual work planning exercise with key officers present to provide advice. 4. Executive Members to introduce reports and answer questions where they can with officers playing a supporting role. 5. Potentially questioning skills training (externally provided). 6. Pre-meetings with the Chair could take place further in advance of meetings after the agenda has gone out, rather than on the day when there is very little time to react.
Councillor	Minutes don't always reflect the minutiae of debates, but that may be a good thing.
Officer	Officers have been extensively scrutinised in previous meetings that I have witnessed, as if they were on a 'hot seat'. Members, senior leadership and managers should be leading presentations and Q&A sessions, and deferring to officers for technical input. This will relieve the pressure on officers. The atmosphere is unpleasant. Committees should be a 'critical friend' and solution focused, rather than aggressively grilling officers. Perhaps Members should be consulted on projects and have a chance to feed into them earlier, if that is possible within the legislative framework.
Officer	Executive members should present their reports and be sat at the table as part of the meeting to encourage their greater participation supported by the lead officer who would be able to add any necessary technical details
Officer	More focus on decisions actually being taken at Exec and ensuring that meetings are not derailed by one agenda item - e.g Westhive. Healthy debate is good but if there is an agenda and time - then should try and stick to that.
Councillor	Go back to the old way of doing scrutiny
Councillor	Exec members should introduce topics (to indicate accountability), but leave officers to present them (who have the detail at their fingertips)
Councillor	Return to previous effectiveness and high level of accountability!

Councillor	Same as my previous comments.
Councillor	There haven't - yet - been any subcommittees or task & finish groups set up as part of the new style O&S Scrutiny Committee. My recollection is that the use of these was anticipated as part of the reduction of the number of scrutiny committees and the increase in size of the membership compared with previous committees. That is something that ought to be made more of in the future.
Councillor	When originally suggested, as I understood the plans, O&S was intended to develop working groups on particular issues. That has not happened but I have a feeling such WGs would only lead to the equivalent of a lot of committees again. and prolonged meetings as the WG report back to O&S....and O&S discuss the WG's conclusions.
Councillor	Split into 3 committees
Councillor	The O and S function is important but needs to be streamlined and more integrated with Executive and Council decision making and given more emphasis. I suggest more judicious work programming, more attention to contentious matters (social housing, climate response, outsourcing etc), and the need to have an agreed O and S sign-off statement as key items proceed forward to decision making.
Councillor	I believe the trial has failed and we should look at ways to split it up maybe under the new headings of Finance, Governance and Place
Councillor	Organise some direct training on Scrutiny and Governance and what is expected of them for members. To organise the agenda to cover a set of items that can be covered in a reasonable time. To be sure that each item is clearly defined, explained and what decision is required of the O&S committee. This decision should be "approved as is", or to define "changes required". There should be no agenda item in which the O&S committee is asked to "NOTE" the item. There could be a list of topics on which "decisions' are coming up in the Exec (or to be made by delegated authority by officers) for the O&S committee to be made aware of. Once the decision has been taken it can then come to the O&S as an agenda item to be scrutinised and approved or not!

Annex B - Attendance

	Total Members present	As expected	As substitutes
8 November 2023	23	22	1
6 December 2023	17	15	2
18 December 2023	19	17	2
10 January 2024	20	19	1
7 February 2024	14	14	0
29 February 2024	17	15	2
10 April 2024	18	18	0
5 June 2024	22	20	2
17 July 2024	24	23	1
4 September 2024	21	20	1
2 October 2024	17	15	2
6 November 2024	19	19	0
4 December 2024	20	18	2
8 January 2025	21	21	0
5 February 2025	19	18	1
5 March 2025	22	22	0
Average	19.6	18.5	1.1

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 <p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>	<p>WEST OXFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL</p>
<p>Name and date of Committee</p>	<p>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 16 APRIL 2025</p>
<p>Subject</p>	<p>OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME</p>
<p>Wards affected</p>	<p>None</p>
<p>Accountable member</p>	<p>Councillor Andrew Beaney, Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Email: Andrew.beaney@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Accountable officer</p>	<p>Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Report author</p>	<p>Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk</p>
<p>Summary/Purpose</p>	<p>To formulate a provisional work programme for 2025/26, having regard to the TOPIC criteria and the suggestions put forward by officers and members.</p>
<p>Annexes</p>	<p>Annex A – TOPIC criteria Annex B – Proposed work plan and suggested items Annex C – Member briefings programme</p>
<p>Recommendation(s)</p>	<p>That Overview and Scrutiny resolves to:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree the provisional work programme for 2025/26 (Annex B). 2. Agree the inclusion of any additional suggestions into the work programme. 3. Note the suggested Task and Finish reviews for 2025/26. 4. Note the provisional programme of member briefings and suggest any further briefing topics.
<p>Corporate priorities</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working Together for West Oxfordshire
<p>Key Decision</p>	<p>NO</p>
<p>Exempt</p>	<p>NO</p>

Consultees/ Consultation	Management team

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report invites the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to agree a provisional work programme for 2025/26. This follows a scrutiny self-assessment exercise, the results of which suggest that the Committee undertakes a work planning exercise and makes greater use of task and finish groups.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Overview and scrutiny committees are empowered to review and scrutinise decisions taken by the Executive and to investigate and make reports on any matters which affect the district or its inhabitants.
- 2.2** It is good practice for overview and scrutiny committees to operate a work plan which is agreed annually but is reviewed regularly at meetings and adjusted during the year in response to emerging issues or priorities. This approach helps to ensure that the Committee can undertake its functions in a planned and effective way.
- 2.3** The work plan will show the expected business for meetings through the year and may also provide details of any task and finish groups established by the Committee.
- 2.4** The business for meetings will include selected Executive reports for pre-decision scrutiny and reports on other issues prioritised by the Committee.

3. PRIORITISATION

- 3.1** When considering its work plan, the Committee is asked to prioritise which issues would benefit from scrutiny by elected Members and how the Committee can add value to the work of the Council to improve outcomes in the district. This is especially the case where the Committee wishes to commission reports from officers or engage with external organisations; activities which can be resource intensive. The TOPIC criteria (Annex A) is intended to provide some key principles the Committee may wish to have regard to when prioritising items for inclusion in the work programme (e.g. timeliness, ability to influence, etc.).

4. PROVISIONAL WORK PROGRAMME FOR 2025/26

- 4.1** Officers have begun the process of producing a provisional work programme for 2025/26 (Annex B). This includes some pre-decision scrutiny items carried forwards from 2024/25 (e.g. Knights Court Business Case, Climate Change Strategy), regular or annual Executive reports for pre-decision scrutiny (e.g. quarterly performance reports, Budget, Local Plan Annual Monitoring report, etc.) and some additional items suggested by officers which have been considered against the TOPIC criteria:
- Local Government Reorganisation – pre-decision scrutiny of an Executive report expected in October/November 2025.
 - Community Grants Update – to consider the impact of the Westhive scheme and the new small grants scheme, which the Committee previously asked to be (re)introduced.

- Community Safety Partnership – to enable the Committee to undertake its statutory function as a Crime and Disorder Committee.
- Procurement and Contract Management Strategy – pre-decision scrutiny of an Executive report expected in Spring 2026.

- 4.2** Annex B also contains a list of items suggested by Members for inclusion in the work programme. The Committee is recommended to agree which of these items (and/or any other suggestions made at the meeting) should be included in the work programme, having regard to the TOPIC criteria (Annex A).
- 4.3** An alternative to including items in the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme is to include them in the programme of member briefing sessions. These sessions tend to take place remotely over Teams and provide an alternative means of Members receiving information and asking questions about Council services and key issues affecting the district. The current programme of member briefings for 2025/26, which includes some slots that are still to be allocated, is included as Annex C.
- 4.4** Following the decisions of the Committee on 16 April 2025, an updated version of the provisional work programme for 2025/26 will be presented to the first meeting of the Committee after the Annual Council meeting on 21 May 2025 for agreement. The work programme will then be reviewed at each Committee meeting so that the Committee may make adjustments to it during the year. The Committee will also review the Executive Work Programme at each meeting and decide which additional items to add to the Committee's work programme for pre-decision scrutiny.

5. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

- 5.1** A key outcome from the self-assessment exercise is that the Committee should make greater use of task and finish groups to explore key issues in depth and/or to shape policy development. The Council's management team has suggested that useful topics for task and finish groups would be public conveniences, waste transformation, and the leisure contract. The work of these or any other task and finish groups would need to be scoped in more detail but the intention is for one or more task and finish groups to be established by the Committee, and members appointed, at the first Committee meeting of the new civic year, on 21 May 2025.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1** The Committee can choose which items to include or not include within its work plan and may wish to suggest additional topics for member briefings.

7. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1** There are no financial implications arising from the recommendations in this report.

8. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1** The Council operates executive arrangements and as such must have at least one Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Local Government Act 2000 provides the statutory basis for overview and scrutiny committees and their powers.

9. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 9.1** There are no significant risks arising from this report.

10. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 10.1** There are no differential impacts on groups with protected characteristics.

11. CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCIES IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1** There are no climate and ecological emergencies implications arising from this report.

12. BACKGROUND PAPERS

None.

(END)

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'TOPIC' Scoring Criteria for Scrutiny Work Plan Items

Criteria

Description

Scoring

T imely	Work plan prioritisation should take account of work in other areas, and avoid duplication. Key questions to ask include: Is now the best time to consider this issue? Are legislative or policy changes afoot? Is the issue due for inspection or auditing?	Is it timely to consider this issue? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2
O rganisational Priority	Work plans should take account of the Council's overall vision for the area. Committee's should ensure that a good proportion of their work relates to the Council's plan and priorities. This is key in demonstrating how Scrutiny can add value to the Council.	Is it a council priority? No - 0 Somewhat - 2 Yes - 3
P ublic Interest	Councillors' representative roles are an essential feature of Scrutiny. They are the eyes and ears of the public, ensuring that services meet local needs. The interests of local people should therefore influence and guide the issues chosen for scrutiny.	Is it of significant public Interest? No - 0 Somewhat - 2 Yes - 3
I nfluence	Scrutiny Committees have varying levels of influence, depending on the issues they review. They are better placed to influence council services than external agencies. Will your input drive outcomes and change, or be unwelcome and lack impact?	Can we have meaningful influence? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2
C ost	Services or decisions which incur a high level of income, expenditure or savings should be prioritised. Effective scrutiny of financial matters is a cornerstone of good scrutiny, and significant spending plans should not go unscrutinised.	Is the issue costly? No - 0 Somewhat - 1 Yes - 2

The TOPIC scoring system has been developed to assist the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in prioritising work plan items. Criteria led work planning has been advocated by national governance experts and organisations alike, premised on the objective prioritisation of items against pre-set criteria. TOPIC can be used as a reference guide for councillors in selecting items, or it can be rigidly applied as a scoring system. How strictly the criteria is applied will depend of the number of items suggested and the resources available.

Whilst the scoring system aspires to be objective, it cannot necessarily take account of the nuances and complexities of all issues, and Committees should use their best judgement in agreeing which items to take forward.

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WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WORK PROGRAMME 1 FEBRUARY 2025 – 31 MAY 2025

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

The Council currently operates the Strong Leader and Executive form of governance. The Council has appointed one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which has the power to investigate Executive decisions and any other matters relevant to the district and its people, making recommendations to the Council, Executive or any other Committee or Sub-Committee of the Council.

Overview and Scrutiny Activities

The Committee may undertake its functions through the following types of activities:

- Holding the Executive to account as a critical friend
- Pre-decision scrutiny of Executive decisions before they are taken
- Considering any “call-in” of an Executive decision that has been made but not yet implemented
- Contributing to policy development
- Undertaking task and finish reviews to explore particular issues in depth
- Scrutiny of the Council’s annual budget proposals
- Performance review and monitoring
- Being a convener and engaging with external organisations
- Scrutiny of the Council’s crime and disorder functions

Work Plan

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee operates a work plan which is agreed annually but provides for flexibility to enable the Committee to respond to emerging issues or priorities. The work plan will include a mix of Executive reports that have been selected for pre-decision scrutiny, and reports on other Council services, topics or issues which have been specifically requested by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. In setting and reviewing its work plan, the Committee will be mindful of the constraints of the organisation and may prioritise based on the following considerations (TOPIC criteria):

Timeliness: Is it timely to consider this issue?

Organisational priority: Is it a Council priority?

Public Interest: Is it of significant public interest?

Influence: Can Scrutiny have meaningful influence?

Cost: Does it involve a high level of expenditure, income or savings?

Principles of good scrutiny

The Centre for Governance and Scrutiny has developed four principles of good scrutiny which are reflected in statutory guidance:

- Provide constructive “critical friend” challenge
- Amplify the voices and concerns of the public
- Be led by independent people who take responsibility for their role
- Drive improvement in public services

Current and planned working groups – to be confirmed at Annual Council

Title	Purpose	Membership	Status	Target completion date
Public Conveniences	TBC	TBC	Planned	TBC
Waste transformation	TBC	TBC	Planned	TBC
Leisure	TBC	TBC	Planned	TBC

Item	Executive Member	Lead Officer
Wednesday, 16 April 2025		
Community Safety Partnership	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Emmylou Brossard, Safer Communities Officer Emmylou.Brossard@westoxon.gov.uk
The Nature Recovery Plan	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
Review of the Overview and Scrutiny Function	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Ana Prelici, Senior Democratic Services Officer Ana.Prelici@westoxon.gov.uk
Tuesday 13 May 2025		
West Oxfordshire Local Plan 2041	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Andrew Thomson, Planning Policy Manager Andrew.Thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Wednesday 21 May - Annual Council day		
4 June 2025		
Knights Court Business Case	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Andrew Turner, Business Manager - Assets and Council Priorities andrew.turner@publicagroup.uk
2024/25 Quarterly Finance Review Q4	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk

2024/25 Quarterly Service Review Q4	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
2 July 2025		
Climate Change Strategy	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
3 September 2025		
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q1	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q1	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
8 October 2025		
5 November 2025		
Local Government Reorganisation	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Astrid Harvey, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer Astrid.Harvey@westoxon.gov.uk
10 December 2025		
Local Plan Annual Monitoring 2024/25	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Andrew Thomson, Planning Policy Manager Andrew.Thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q2	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant

	Smith	georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q2	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
7 January 2026		
Draft Budget 2026/27 version 2	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
4 February 2026		
Community Grants Update		Heather McCulloch, Community Wellbeing Manager heather.mcculloch@westoxon.gov.uk
4 March 2026		
Community Safety Partnership	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Heather McCulloch, Community Wellbeing Manager heather.mcculloch@westoxon.gov.uk
Procurement and Contract Management Strategy	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Ciaran Okane, Senior Business Partner - Procurement Ciaran.Okane@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q3	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q3	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk

Topics for consideration identified by members;

- Housing Associations – scrutiny regarding housing allocation, rent prices, homelessness etc.
- Thames Water and meeting demand for water pressure
- How to get houses built in rural areas for local people with rural exception sites or any other mechanisms
- Responding to the Youth Needs Assessment carried out a couple of years ago
- Actioning Oxfordshire's Local Area Energy Plan in West Oxon
- Supporting mental health initiatives

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West Oxfordshire District Council

2025/26 Member Briefings and Training Tracker – Programme Timetable

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<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Start Time</u>	<u>Subject Matter(s)</u>
8 May 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	Modern Design/Section 106 Agreements/Biodiversity
5 June 25	Council Chambers, Witney	5.30pm	Chief Constable and Police and Crime Commissioner Annual Presentation
3 July 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	Local Government Reorganisation (TBC)
4 Sept 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	Emergency Planning
9 Oct 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	TBC
6 Nov 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	TBC
4 Dec 25	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	Ubico Briefing
8 Jan 26	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	Budget 2025 / 2026
5 Feb 26	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	TBC
5 March 26	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	TBC
2 April 26	Microsoft Teams	5.30pm	TBC

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**EXECUTIVE WORK PROGRAMME
INCORPORATING NOTICE OF DECISIONS PROPOSED TO BE TAKEN IN PRIVATE
SESSION AND NOTICE OF INTENTION TO MAKE A KEY DECISION
1 MARCH 2025 – 30 JUNE 2025**

By virtue of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012, local authorities are required to publish a notice setting out the key executive decisions that will be taken at least 28 days before such decisions are to be taken. The Regulations also require notice to be given of any matter where it is proposed that the public will be excluded during consideration of the matter.

This Forward Plan incorporates both of these requirements. In the interests of transparency, it also aims to include details of those items to be debated by the Executive that relate to either policy/budget formulation, matters which will be subject to a recommendation to the Council, and other matters due to be considered by the Executive. This programme covers a period of four months, and will be updated on a monthly basis. The timings of items may be subject to change.

It should be noted that although a date not less than 28 clear days after the date of this notice is given in each case, it is possible that matters may be rescheduled to a date which is different from that given provided, in the cases of key decisions and matters to be considered in private, that the 28 day notice has been given. In this regard, please note that agendas and reports for meetings of the Executive are made available on the Council's website at www.westoxon.gov.uk/meetings five working days in advance of the meeting in question. Please also note that the agendas for meetings of the Executive will also incorporate a necessary further notice which is required to be given in relation to matters likely to be considered with the public excluded.

There are circumstances where a key decision can be taken, or a matter may be considered in private, even though the 28 clear days' notice has not been given. If that happens, notice of the matter and the reasons will be published on the council's website, and available from the Council Offices, Woodgreen, Witney, Oxfordshire OX28 1NB.

Key Decisions

The Regulations define a key decision as an executive decision which is likely –

- (a) to result in the relevant local authority incurring expenditure which is, or the making of savings which are, significant having regard to the relevant local authority's budget for the service or function to which the decision relates; or*
- (b) to be significant in terms of its effects on communities living or working in an area comprising two or more wards in the area of the authority".*

The Council has decided that a cost or saving of an amount greater than £150,000 is necessary to constitute expenditure or savings which are significant for the purposes of this definition.

Please note that if a matter is approved by the Council following a recommendation from the Executive, that decision will not be a key decision.

Matters To Be Considered in Private

The great majority of matters considered by the Council's Executive are considered in 'open session' when the public have the right to attend.

However, some matters are considered with the public excluded. The public may only be excluded if a resolution is passed to exclude them. The grounds for exclusion are limited to situations where confidential or exempt information may be disclosed to the public if present and, in most cases involving exempt information, where in all the circumstances of the case the public interest in maintaining the exemption outweighs the public interest in disclosing the information. The definitions of these are set out in the Council's Constitution.

Documents and Queries

Copies of, or extracts from, documents listed in the programme and any which subsequently become available are (subject to any prohibition or restriction on their disclosure), obtainable from the following, and this contact information may also be used for any queries.

Democratic Services – Email: democratic.services@westoxon.gov.uk Tel: 01993 861000.

West Oxfordshire District Council: Executive Members 2024/25

Name of Councillor	Title and Areas of Responsibility
Andy Graham (Leader)	Leader of the Council: Overview of all Executive Portfolios; Policy Framework; Town and Parish Council Engagement; Council Plan; Strategic Partnerships (including Pan Regional Partnership, Future Oxfordshire, South East Councils and OXLEP); Oxfordshire Leaders; Publica and Partnerships Authorities and Ubico; Democratic Services; Communications; Legal Services; Emergency Planning; Assets of Community Value, Customer Services.
Duncan Enright (Deputy Leader)	Economic Development: Economic Development; Business Development; Visitor Economy; Town and Village Regeneration; Customer Services.
Alaric Smith	Finance: Finance & Management; Council Tax and Benefits; Asset Management; South West Audit Partnership; Performance Management; Capital Investment Strategy; Strategic Housing Investment; Financial Aspects of Major Projects; Customer Services; Counter Fraud.
Hugo Ashton	Planning: Local Plan; Government Planning Policies and Guidance; Development Management; Ensuring Planning Policies meet 2030 Requirements; Customer Services.
Tim Sumner	Leisure and Major Projects: Conservation and Historic Environment; Leisure Provision (including Swimming Pools); Culture and Heritage; Public Art; Agile Working; Car Parking; Customer Services.
Rachel Crouch	Stronger, Healthy Communities: Voluntary Sector Engagement; Health and Safety; Community and Public Health; Refugee Resettlement Programme; Young People; Equality and Diversity; Customer Services.
Geoff Saul	Housing and Social Care: Housing Allocations; Homelessness; Provision of Affordable Homes; Sheltered Housing Accommodation; Safeguarding – Community Safety Partnership; Crime and Disorder; Neighbourhood Policing; Scrutiny of Police and Crime Commissioner, Customer Services.
Lidia Arciszewska	Environment: •Flood Alleviation/Natural Flood Management and Sewage; Environmental Partnerships – WASP and Evenlode; North East Cotswold Cluster; Waste Collection and Recycling; Landscape and Biodiversity; Air Quality; Land Use, Food Production and Farming; Street Scene (Cleansing, Litter and Grounds Maintenance); Food safety; licensing; Housing (private landlords); Environment safety; Customer Services.
Andrew Prosser	Climate Action and Nature Recovery: Energy Advice; Renewable Energy and RetroFit Investment; Biodiversity (Across the District); Carbon Neutral by 2030; Fossil Fuel Dependence Reduction; Local, National and County Liaison on Climate Change; Electric Vehicle (EV) Charging Rollout, Customer Services.

For further information about the above and all members of the Council please see www.westoxon.gov.uk/councillors

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Review of Members' Allowances Scheme	No	Open	Council	21 May 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk
Strategic Partnerships Update	No	Open	Council	21 May 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Astrid Harvey, Strategic Policy and Partnerships Officer Astrid.Harvey@westoxon.gov.uk
Community Governance Reviews	No	Open	Council	21 May 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Andrew Brown, Head of Democratic and Electoral Services andrew.brown@westoxon.gov.uk
Executive 11 June 2025						
Car Parking Strategy	Yes	Open	Executive	11 Jun 2025	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Susan Hughes, Business Manager for Support and Advice Susan.Hughes@publicagroup.uk
Review of the Ubico Shareholder Agreement & Ubico Board Member Appointments	No	Open	Executive	11 Jun 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Bill Oddy, Assistant Director for Commercial Development Bill.Oddy@publicagroup.uk
Public Toilet Review	Yes	Open	Executive	11 Jun 2025	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Lidia Arciszewska	Fiona Woodhouse, Parking Projects & Contracts Officer Fiona.Woodhouse@publicagroup.uk
Knights Court Business Case	Yes	Open	Executive	11 Jun 2025	Executive Member for Housing and Social Care - Cllr Geoff Saul	Andrew Turner, Business Manager - Assets and Council Priorities

Executive 10 September 2025						
Oxfordshire Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)	No	Open	Executive	10 Sep 2025	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q1	No	Open	Executive	10 Sep 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q1	No	Open	Executive	10 Sep 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Council 1 October 2025						
Executive 15 October 2025						
Executive 12 November 2025						
Council tax support 2026/27	Yes	Open	Executive Council	12 Nov 2025 3 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Mandy Fathers, Business Manager - Environmental, Welfare & Revenue Service mandy.fathers@publicagroup.uk
Council 3 December 2025						
Executive 17 December 2025						
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q2	No	Open	Executive	17 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk

2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q2	No	Open	Executive	17 Dec 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Draft Budget 2026/27 version 1	Yes	Open	Executive	17 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
Local Plan Annual Monitoring 2024/25	No	Open	Executive	17 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Planning - Cllr Hugo Ashton	Andrew Thomson, Lead Planning Policy & Implementation Andrew.Thomson@westoxon.gov.uk
Executive 14 January 2026						
Draft Budget 2026/27 version 2	Yes	Open	Executive	14 Jan 2026	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
Council 28 January 2026						
Executive 11 February 2026						
Budget 2026/27 & medium term financial strategy	Yes	Open	Executive Council	11 Feb 2026 25 Feb 2026	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
Council 25 February 2026						
Council tax 2026/27	No	Open	Council	25 Feb 2026	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk

Executive 11 March 2026						
2025/26 Quarterly Finance Review Q3	No	Open	Executive	11 Mar 2026	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Georgina Dyer, Chief Accountant georgina.dyer@publicagroup.uk
2025/26 Quarterly Service Review Q3	No	Open	Executive	11 Mar 2026	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Alison Borrett, Senior Performance Analyst Alison.Borrett@publicagroup.uk
Key Decision Delegated to Executive Member						
UK Shared Prosperity Fund and Rural England Prosperity Fund	No	Open	Executive Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development - Cllr Duncan Enright	Before 31 Mar 2026	Deputy Leader of the Council and Executive Member for Economic Development - Cllr Duncan Enright	Emma Phillips, Market Town Officer Emma.phillips@westoxon.gov.uk
Key Decisions Delegated to Officers						
Allocation of S106 Monies to Witney Town Council to Design, Build and Operate a New Third Generation (3G) Pitch at West Witney Sports	Yes	Open	Executive Director of Place - Phil Martin	11 Sep 2024 Before 31 Mar 2026	Executive Member for Leisure and Major Projects - Cllr Tim Sumner	Leisure Strategy Manager - Rachel Biles

Ground						
Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 4: Chipping Norton Leisure Centre To accept Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme Phase 4 grant funding for Chipping Norton Leisure Centre and to contribute a maximum of £317,326 equating to 12% of total project costs.	Yes	Open	Executive Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service - Giles Hughes	15 Jan 2025 Before 31 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Climate Action and Nature Recovery - Cllr Andrew Prosser	Hannah Kenyon, Climate Change Manager hannah.kenyon@westoxon.gov.uk
Delegation on Purchase of Emergency Accommodation Seeking approval to delegate decision making around the purchase of Emergency Housing Accommodation in order to meet market demands.	Yes	Fully exempt <i>Exempt on the grounds that it would otherwise disclose the Council's intention to offer of properties and the funds it is making available with which to do so.</i>	Executive Director of Finance - Madhu Richards	12 Feb 2025 31 Dec 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Jon Dearing, Interim Executive Director jon.dearing@publicagroup.uk

Dry Mixed Recycling Bulking and Haulage Contract	Yes	Part exempt	Executive Assistant Director - Commercial Development - Bill Oddy	11 Sep 2024 Before 31 Mar 2026	Executive Member for Environment - Cllr Lidia Arciszewska	Simon Anthony, Business Manager - Environmental Services Simon.Anthony@publicagroup.uk
Standing Delegation: Settlement of Legal Claims	Yes	Open	Head of Legal Services - Helen Blundell	Before 31 Mar 2026	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham, Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Helen Blundell, Interim Head of Legal Services helen.blundell@fdean.gov.uk
Review and Repurpose Earmarked Reserves to Mitigate against Four Main Financial Risks	Yes	Open	Director of Finance - Madhu Richards	Before 31 May 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk
Allocation of New Initiatives Funding	Yes	Open	Chief Executive & Head of Paid Service - Giles Hughes	Before 31 Mar 2025	Leader of the Council - Cllr Andy Graham	Giles Hughes, Chief Executive Officer giles.hughes@westoxon.gov.uk
Allocate Funding from the Project Contingency Earmarked Reserve	Yes	Open	Director of Finance - Madhu Richards	Before 31 Mar 2025	Executive Member for Finance - Cllr Alaric Smith	Madhu Richards, Director of Finance madhu.richards@westoxon.gov.uk

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