



**WEST OXFORDSHIRE
DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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Name and date of Committee	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY – 8 JULY 2026 COUNCIL – 22 JULY 2026
Subject	OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE ANNUAL REPORT 2025/26
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 receive a report highlighting the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee over the 2025/26 civic year
Annexes	Annex A – Overview and Scrutiny Recommendations Annex B (For Full Council) – Overview and Scrutiny Work Plan
Recommendation(s)	That Overview and Scrutiny Committee resolves to: 1. Note the report. 2. Agree any further recommendations related to the Committee's remit to Full Council.
Corporate priorities	• Working Together for West Oxfordshire
Key Decision	NO
Exempt	NO
Consultees/ Consultation	N/A

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1** This report summarises the work undertaken by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee during the 2025/26 civic year and demonstrates how the Committee has continued to provide constructive challenge to the Executive through pre-decision scrutiny, recommendations and task and finish activity.
- 1.2** During the year, the Committee made 75 recommendations to the Executive across ten topic areas, with 45 recommendations either fully or partially accepted. This indicates that scrutiny has been able to influence Executive decision-making in a constructive and proportionate way, with recommendations generally focused on strengthening or amending proposals rather than opposing them outright.
- 1.3** The report also reflects on the Committee's use of task and finish groups, including work on leisure provision, public conveniences and waste transformation. It identifies opportunities to further improve the process through earlier officer involvement, clearer scoping, formal reporting back to the Committee, and stronger tracking of outcomes from scrutiny recommendations.

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.
- 2.2** Overview and Scrutiny Committees have statutory powers under the Local Government Act 2000 to review and scrutinise Executive decisions and actions. They may "call in" decisions before implementation, delaying them to allow examination and, where appropriate, recommending that the decision-maker reconsider. They can review whether decisions are consistent with the policy framework and budget, and refer matters to Full Council if they are not.
- 2.3** 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.
- 2.4** Section 5C of the Council's Constitution requires the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to report annually to full Council on its workings and make recommendations for future work programmes and amended working methods if appropriate.
- 2.5** 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).

- 2.6 In April 2025, an internal review of the Committee's function including a self-assessment was carried out. As part of this, several changes were made to how the Committee carries out its functions. The main changes were to reduce the size of the committee to 15 members and to make greater use of task and finish groups.
- 2.7 The Council under the Executive and Leader model now has an effective Overview and Scrutiny Committee which provides pre-decision scrutiny of selected Executive decisions and contributes to the development of the Council's Budget and Policy Framework. The Committee is also empowered to consider other issues that affect the district or its people.
- 2.8 Decisions to be taken by Executive are (subject to urgency rules) published on the Forward Plan for a minimum of 28 days in line with the statutory provisions of The Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Meetings and Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012. This includes Key Officer Decisions, delegated by Executive. For completeness, Council decisions are also included on the Forward Plan.
- 2.9 The Committee of 15 Members, chaired by an opposition Member, provides oversight of the work of the Executive and will question Executive Members about proposals within their portfolio responsibilities.
- 2.10 Annex B provides the current Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme. This work programme is agreed annually but reviewed at each meeting and adjusted to take account of emerging priorities and any adjustments to the Executive Forward Plan.

3. THE VALUE OF SCRUTINY AND CONSTRUCTIVE CHALLENGE

- 3.1 For Overview and Scrutiny to be effective, it must be able to demonstrate its ability to scrutinise the work of Executive and provide 'critical friend' analysis of proposals due to come before it.
- 3.2 Under the Leader and Executive Model operated by the Council, Overview and Scrutiny has a key role in providing democratic checks and balances in relation to the Executive.

4. WORK OF THE COMMITTEE

- 4.1 The Committee's work over the year can be looked at through the recommendations made to the council's Executive, as well as the task and finish reviews carried out.
- 4.2 The Overview and Scrutiny Committee made 75 recommendations to the Executive, contained in Annex A, of which 45 were fully or partially accepted. The Committee made recommendations on ten different topics, and the general nature of these was that they proposed amendments to the Executive proposals rather than a wholesale objection to the proposals.
- 4.3 Additionally four recommendations were made to Oxfordshire County Council on proposed changes to fire services, setting out the Committee's concerns on behalf of full Council. This followed a Council motion being referred to the Committee.

- 4.4** Overall, the Committee has been performing its functions successfully, providing a ‘critical friend’ challenge to the Council’s Executive. In particular, the number of recommendations that were made and accepted, shows that the Committee has been achieving the aim of properly embedding pre-decision scrutiny as part of the Executive decision-making process. The number of accepted recommendations also indicates that these were constructive. If a very high number of recommendations were accepted, that could be seen to indicate that the recommendations were not sufficiently challenging. Conversely, a very low number of accepted recommendations could be seen to indicate that the recommendations were not useful.
- 4.5** The Committee has not ‘called-in’ any decisions. The call-in function is essential, but should be used by committees as a last resort, this is due to the fact that calling in decisions can slow down their implementation and potentially also lead to reputational risks for the authority. The need for call-in to be used can be mitigated by effective pre-decision scrutiny, so the lack of call-in indicates that pre-decision scrutiny is operating effectively.

5. TASK AND FINISH GROUPS

- 5.1** The Overview and Scrutiny Committee appointed three task and finish groups; Leisure Strategy, Public Conveniences and Waste Transformation.

5.2 LEISURE STRATEGY TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 5.2.1** The purpose of the Leisure Strategy Task and Finish Group was to support the development of the evaluation criteria to determine the best delivery model for leisure provision in the Council-owned facilities. This formed part of the Leisure Management Options Appraisal to provide the Council with an objective, transparent, and rigorous assessment of all the leisure management options and their appropriateness for each of the facilities currently within the Leisure Management Contract.
- 5.2.2** The Leisure Strategy Task and Finish Group met three times, first to agree the draft evaluation criteria and their terms of reference, secondly to receive a consultants’ report on these criteria and finally to carry out pre-decision scrutiny of the Leisure Management Options Appraisal.
- 5.2.3** The Task and Finish Group reported back to the Committee but did not make any formal recommendations to the Executive.

5.3 PUBLIC CONVENIENCES TASK AND FINISH GROUP

- 5.3.1** The Purpose of the Public Conveniences Task and Finish Group held a series of meetings to consider and interrogate different options for the future of public conveniences in the district.
- 5.3.2** The group held several meetings ahead of the Executive meeting considering the future of public conveniences and provided feedback to officers prior to the Executive’s decision to invest further into the District’s public conveniences. As the feedback was incorporated

into the Executive report the Group did not make any formal recommendations to the Executive.

5.4 WASTE TRANSFORMATION TASK AND FINISH GROUP

5.4.1 The purpose of the Waste Transformation Task and Finish Group was to consider any proposals for transforming waste services within the district following phase two of the Publica transition.

5.4.2 The Task and Finish Group met three times, including carrying out pre-decision scrutiny of the Waste and Environmental Services Programme. The Task and Finish Group submitted four comments to the Executive, of which three were agreed.

5.5 SUGGESTED FURTHER IMPROVEMENTS

5.6 The main suggested points for further improvement are as follows;

5.7 Lead officers for task and finish groups to be identified and involved at an earlier stage for topics to have a clearer scope prior to the Task and Finish meeting.

5.8 A clearer process for Task and Finish groups, which is set out below.

1. Topics suggested by Members at Committee.
2. Senior Management Team to review and identify topics suitable for Task and Finish Groups or determine alternative routes for addressing issues/concerns with Members.
3. Democratic Services to meet with Lead Officers to agree scope, including in-scope and out-of-scope elements, and draft initial Task and Finish proposals.
4. Task and Finish Groups to be approved by Committee, with Member appointments agreed. Generally the Members appointed to Task and Finish Groups should be from the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.
5. Task and Finish groups to meet and carry out work.
6. Any reports and recommendations to be reported back to the Committee (drafted by Democratic Services) and formally agreed for submission to the Executive.
7. Executive to consider recommendations and provide a formal written response (agree/not agree, and any comment).
8. Executive response to recommendations reported back to Committee.

5.9 As prior, the Lead Member (Chair) of the Task and Finish groups should be on the Committee. Other non-executive members are welcome to sit on these, however due to low attendance at some task and finish group meetings, it is suggested that this only extend to members with a particular interest or expertise in the topic.

5.10 In order to achieve better transparency, the task and finish groups will produce a report summing up their work to the parent committee (whether or not there are recommendations). To achieve a higher profile for their recommendations, the

recommendations to Executive resulting from the work of these groups will be made directly from the Committee to the Executive.

- 5.11 To allow officers to obtain detailed information in advance, the chair has asked members pre-submit questions to Democratic Services ahead of meetings. This is particularly important for quarterly performance reporting, where the officer compiling the report may not have detailed information on other service areas eg. waste collection. A better process for reporting written responses to the committee will also be established
- 5.12 Executive Members were involved in some of the task and finish groups. This worked well, however it is important for the Task and Finish Group to also be able to meet independently so as to be able to formulate recommendations.
- 5.13 The length of Committee meetings has been very long in some cases, and there is a need to control these where possible and also consider whether the start time of 5:30pm is still the best option. The Council's Health and Safety Business Partner has also recommended breaks hourly for member and officer comfort.
- 5.14 Member briefings have been working well, and these should continue to be used as an alternative to task and finish groups where more appropriate.
- 5.15 Looking ahead, the Committee may wish to place greater emphasis on early work planning, clearer scoping of task and finish activity, and stronger tracking of outcomes from scrutiny recommendations. This would help ensure that scrutiny activity remains focused, evidence-led and capable of influencing decisions at the most appropriate stage.

6. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 6.1 The report is for noting, therefore there are no alternative options arising from it.

7. CONCLUSIONS

- 8. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has continued to develop its role as a constructive critical friend to the Executive during 2025/26. The number and nature of recommendations made, together with the use of task and finish groups, demonstrates that scrutiny is becoming more embedded within the Council's decision-making process. The proposed improvements around earlier scoping, clearer work planning, reporting back from task and finish groups, and tracking outcomes will help strengthen this further and ensure that scrutiny activity remains focused, transparent and effective.

9. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

10. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1 There are no financial implications arising from this report.

I1. RISK ASSESSMENT

- 1.1.** There would be risks associated with not having an effective scrutiny function, for example risks of decisions being challenged or called in.

I2. EQUALITIES IMPACT

- 1.2.** There are no equalities impacts arising from this report.

I3. SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

- 13.1** This report is exempt from a SIAT, there are no sustainability implications.

I4. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 14.1** None.

(END)