

**PERFORMANCE, ASSETS AND STRATEGY OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE**

6 October 2026
5.30 - 7.47 pm

Present: Councillors Young (Chair), Gardiner-Smith (Vice-Chair), Bennett, Dalzell, Davey, Flaubert, Griffin and Toye Scott

Officers:

Ben Binns - Assistant Director for Development
Stephen Kelly - Joint Director for Planning and Economic Development
Jonathan Dixon - Planning Policy Manager
Lauren Wilkinson - Planning Policy and Strategy Team Leader
Jane Wilson - Chief Operating Officer
Justin Long - Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer
Sarah Michael - Democratic Services Officer

Other councillors in attendance:

Councillor Jenny Gawthrope Wood, Cabinet Member for Finance and Corporate Operations
Councillor Martin Smart, Cabinet Member for Nature, Open Spaces and City Services

Joining Online:

Councillor Gerri Bird, Cabinet Member for Housing
Councillor Katie Thornburrow, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Planning and Transport
Councillor Katie Porrer
Councillor Sarah Nicmanis
Councillor Jacqui Whitmore

FOR THE INFORMATION OF THE COUNCIL

26/22/P&A Apologies for Absence

There were no apologies for absence.

26/23/P&A Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

26/24/P&A Minutes

The Minutes of the meeting held on 15 July 2026 were approved as a correct record and would be signed by the Chair.

26/25/P&A Public Questions

Question 1 (Dr. Colin A. B. Davidson) - Given that Cambridge City Council maintains a £10,000 self-insured excess per incident for public liability—meaning third-party property damage claims under £10,000 are funded 100% directly from local public reserves—and given that senior officers have formally confirmed in writing that they will not institute a zero-cost point-of-work property ownership check prior to physical works on or immediately next to a home within the city, what risk assessment framework or corporate governance principle justifies deliberately leaving public reserves exposed to avoidable sub-£10,000 payouts, rather than implementing a zero-cost administrative check that completely eliminates off-site incursions onto private land?

Response given by Senior Overview and Scrutiny Officer:

Checks are already in place to verify ownership; these are set out in the detailed response to the public question at this same Committee on 15 July 2026. The Council has not received any evidence that there is a substantive risk of off-site incursion at multiple sites, and actual incidents are minimal. This means that the checks currently in place are highly effective and the risk of inappropriate incursion is extremely low. Additional administrative checks would not be zero-cost, there would be a cost, in staff time and, in some cases, fees. This cost would be disproportionate to the risk highlighted. Moreover, no checks can completely eliminate risk in the way suggested.

Excesses on insurance policies are a standard feature of the market for insurance cover, for both individuals and for organisations like Councils. Having an excess in place reduces the overall cost of the insurance policy and helps to keep premiums manageable while maintaining the required level of cover.

The Monitoring Officer and Section 151 Officer remain satisfied that the current approach is appropriate and proportionate to the scale and nature of the Council's operational activity and risk. The Council does not intend to revisit its position in the absence of substantive new evidence.

A supplementary question was asked:

It took over a month and a formal complaint to get a response to my question from the last committee. That response contained factual errors it was retracted, and the corrected answer was only sent to me last Friday—three months late.

We are asked to accept that operational checks are in place. That seems unlikely. FOI disclosures show that on 3 August 2026, Leader Katie Thornburrow explicitly directed officers to implement an authority-wide point-of-work map check across all operational teams prior to works proximal to properties. Councillor Smart was present when she committed to this and copied in on email confirmation, his subsequent written response rejected it.

FOI records show that on 18 August 2026, the Chief Executive issued instructions for a check around just a single address—repeating the same failed fix (and I have 20 years of incidents backing this up) used by the previous Chief Executive. But that's not the point—the point is this doesn't protect the council from a city-wide unmitigated cost risk.

FOI also revealed there is no operational risk assessment, nor any reliable record of incidents reported to council employees other than by the formal web process. You have no system to escalate or record other complaints made by phone or in person and resolved informally by simply apologizing or making repairs. The claim that there is no evidence that this is a widespread problem can be rejected on the basis that if you don't collect the data, you cannot hide behind the fact that you haven't got it.

My question is simple: Is the Leader's authority-wide mandate in effect across Cambridge today—yes or no?

Given that an authority-wide check costs nothing to run (I reject the claim that it does - a list of properties to work on that you stick to is standard practice for everybody conducting every kind of work in public space and the hubris of the Cambridge City Council in assuming they should be exempt from this good practice is astonishing), did senior management override the Leader's city-wide cost free policy—and in doing so, leave public funds exposed to recurring sub-£10,000 self-insured payouts for preventable civil trespass and damage across the rest of the city? And if so, surely the committee has something to say about that?

The Chair agreed that a written answer would be provided.

Question 2 (Dr Jocelynn Scut) - In April this year (2026) residents of Molewood Close CB4 3SS CB4 CSR and Hazelwood Close CB4 3SN signed a petition requesting Cambridge City Council to consider urgently residents' concerns requiring a solution to ensure safety, amenity, wellbeing and security for all residents including adults (particularly but not only the elderly and those with mobility issues) and children.

- (1) A container depot was set up by Cambridge City Council at the end of Molewood Close, creating a significant hazard, and damage to and lack of amenity which is ongoing for the reasons set out below.
- (2) The significant hazard, damage to and lack of amenity arose from:
 - (a) Trucks arriving and departing during the day, early morning and evening which create noise disturbing residents, and traffic hazards for pedestrians, children, the elderly and persons with mobility issues, as well as being detrimental to health through pollution and impact on safety;
 - (b) Damage to roadways and footpaths through the weight and continuing arrival and departure of the trucks;
 - (c) Loss of amenity in that the view of trees is totally obstructed, there is no green space and the containers have destroyed the grass and green that was there, so that not only is this detrimental to the environment, but impacts on the wellbeing and physical and psychological health of residents;
 - (d) Loss of space for children to play: the right to play is enshrined in the Convention on the Rights of the Child, signed by the United Kingdom in 1990 and ratified 1991, Article 31 which establishes 'the right to play' as an essential right of children. (1991) the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which establishes 'the right to play' as an essential right of all children: 'States Parties recognize the right of the child to rest and leisure, to engage in play and recreational activities appropriate to the age of the child'

Residents requested that Cambridge City Council remove the container depot from Molewood Close, to a location outside and away from Molewood Close and Hazelwood Close so that residents could regain their neighbourhood as a safe, pleasant and secure place to live.

Residents are particularly appreciative of Democrat Services officers in ensuring that (albeit not being an immediate removal, and taking some extended time) the fencing and containers have now been removed.

Residents request that:

1. The area left behind being in an unsightly state, the City Council immediately undertake to do a deep clean of the area, removing all rubbish and weeds, and any other detritus.

Further, in consultation with residents:

2. In conjunction with or following the deep clean, etc, the City Council undertake a planting and design programme that ensures the tree-ed space adjacent to the now recovered parking space is an aesthetically pleasing area, suitable for children to play and for residents to meet.
3. Further, ensuring that this is the residents' wish, tables and benches be incorporated into the plan and design, so that residents are able to enjoy the space as a seating area for meeting, conversation and picnics.
4. General and recycling bins be incorporated into the plan, set discretely to that they are readily accessible but do not constitute an unsightly blemish on the community area.

Response given by Cabinet Member for Housing:

The Council arranged for its maintenance contractor to do the requested work, and this has now been completed.

A supplementary question was asked with the following key points:

- Request that the area be deep cleaned and that Council assess opportunities for tree planting to improve the space for local residents and children.
- Concern that containers had been placed on the site without consultation with residents and requested assurances that appropriate consultation would take place on future proposals affecting council estates. They also asked that suitable alternative locations be identified for such uses in future.
- Thanked Democratic Services officers for their responsive, transparent and accountable handling of the matter.

The Cabinet Member responded to agree to ask officers to review the use of the site, respond to local residents, and consider measures to prevent a similar situation occurring in future.

26/26/P&A Civic Quarter Project

The Committee received a verbal update on the Civic Quarter programme.

The Committee was advised that, due to recent interest rate volatility, further review of the financial modelling was required. Additional time was also needed to provide further member briefings on the proposals.

During discussion, Members:

- Sought assurance that all options would be presented to the Committee for scrutiny.
- Emphasised the importance of ensuring the scrutiny process was meaningful and informed Cabinet's decision-making.
- Sought clarification on how recommendations arising from scrutiny would be reflected in subsequent reports.

The Committee was advised that all options would be included in the report to be considered on 3 November 2026 and that any recommendations arising from scrutiny would be reported to Cabinet before the matter progressed to Full Council.

Officers also advised that the level of information included in the papers, particularly in relation to commercially sensitive or confidential matters, would be determined following advice from Democratic Services.

The Committee noted the update.

26/27/P&A Housing Development Programme

The Committee considered a report on the Housing Development Programme, including updates on the Homes England Strategic Partnership, the Council's development portfolio approach, the Arbury Court and Kingsway redevelopment proposals, and the Davy Road redevelopment.

During discussion, Members:

- Welcomed the £96m Homes England Strategic Partnership funding and the opportunities it provided to increase the delivery of council homes and social rented housing.
- Welcomed the increased provision of larger family homes and discussed progress against the Council's target of up to 10% four-bedroom homes within the development programme.
- Discussed social rent levels and the Council's portfolio approach to delivering affordable housing across development sites, including how affordable housing targets were applied across the wider development programme.
- Welcomed the engagement undertaken with residents on the Arbury Court and Kingsway proposals and emphasised the importance of ongoing consultation and community involvement as the schemes progressed.
- Raised questions regarding the future design and planning approval process for the Arbury Court and Kingsway redevelopment proposals, including governance arrangements and delegated authority.
- Raised concerns regarding the limited financial information provided in the report and requested additional detail for Cabinet, including Housing Revenue Account implications where appropriate.
- Requested that Equality Impact Assessments be reviewed and updated where necessary.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report that would be considered by Cabinet on 20 October 2026.

Further, it was agreed to recommend the following to officers ahead of the Cabinet meeting:

- Include additional financial information within the Cabinet report, including Housing Revenue Account implications where appropriate.
- Review and update Equality Impact Assessments where necessary.

- Provide further information on affordable housing delivery by bedroom size, consultation response figures and anticipated social rent levels where available.

26/28/P&A Article 4 Direction regarding Houses in Multiple Occupation

The Committee considered a report seeking approval to introduce a non-immediate Article 4 Direction to remove permitted development rights for the conversion of dwellings (Use Class C3) to small Houses in Multiple Occupation (Use Class C4) within the urban area of Cambridge.

During discussion, Members:

- Supported the principle of introducing an Article 4 Direction and welcomed the opportunity for smaller HMO conversions to be considered through the planning process.
- Discussed the proposed city-wide extent of the Direction. While a number of Members supported a city-wide approach to avoid displacement of HMO development, some Members questioned whether a more targeted geographical area should be considered and sought further reassurance regarding the evidence for a city-wide boundary.
- Expressed concern that a non-immediate Direction could encourage additional HMO conversions before it came into force and sought assurance that implementation would take place as quickly as permitted by legislation.
- Noted officers' advice that a non-immediate Article 4 Directions was recommended because immediate Article 4 Directions require strong evidence of the need for an immediate harm. Officers further advised that an immediate Direction could expose the Council to potentially significant compensation liabilities, whereas a non-immediate Direction would avoid the risk of compensation claims.
- Recognised the important role HMOs play in providing comparatively affordable accommodation for students, professionals and other residents, while acknowledging the need to improve housing quality and manage amenity impacts.

- Discussed HMO concentrations and management issues and noted that matters relating to concentration thresholds and planning policy would be considered separately including through the Local Plan process.

The Committee supported the recommendations in the report that would be considered by Cabinet on 20 October 2026.

Further, it was agreed to recommend the following to Cabinet:

- Approve the introduction of a non-immediate Article 4 Direction covering the urban area of Cambridge and proceed with public consultation, whilst noting that some Members queried whether a smaller geographical area should be considered.
- Implement the Direction at the earliest opportunity permitted by legislation following consultation and confirmation of the Direction.
- Consider whether any additional measures could be taken during the implementation period to address poor-quality HMO accommodation and management. Noting that there were not options for planning mitigations, and that this would therefore be a wider Council recommendation.

26/29/P&A Q1 Performance Report

The Committee considered the Quarter 1 Performance Report, which provided an overview of the Council's performance, financial position and strategic risks for the period 1 April to 30 June 2026.

During discussion, Members:

- Sought clarification regarding the low level of demand for Disabled Facilities Grants and suggested that further awareness-raising and training be undertaken to ensure residents were aware of the support available.
- Noted that the Council had adopted a revised approach to Disabled Facilities Grants, enabling more than one grant to be awarded to an individual where the standard grant limit was insufficient to meet assessed needs.

- Welcomed the clarity of the report and the inclusion of explanatory narrative alongside performance data, which assisted scrutiny and public understanding of Council performance.

The Committee noted the report.

26/30/P&A Work Programme

The Committee considered the work programme update report.

During discussion, Members:

- Noted that the November meeting would be dedicated to the Civic Quarter, with the January meeting expected to focus on the Budget.
- Suggested a range of future scrutiny topics, including damp and mould in council housing, the Council's relationship with Cambridge Investment Partnership (CIP), support for private renters through licensing and residential environmental health, community wealth building, the Council's wider property portfolio, and an update from the Cambridge Development Corporation.
- Discussed whether a future meeting should be dedicated to housing-related matters or whether greater emphasis should be given to non-housing topics within the Committee's remit.
- Requested consideration of complaints performance as a future scrutiny topic. Officers advised that complaint response performance had fallen below the baseline target for the first time in Quarter 1 and that work was underway to understand the causes and identify improvements.
- Requested that pre-meetings be scheduled at an earlier stage where possible to maximise Member attendance.

The Committee agreed that an additional meeting should be added to the municipal year to accommodate future scrutiny items and noted that the Chair would consider how best to programme the suggested topics.

The meeting ended at 7.47 pm

CHAIR