

To: Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee

Date: 4th April 2013

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: “Helping the High Street” – what can Oxford City Council do to help and support the retail environment? - Update

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To update the Communities and Partnership Scrutiny Committee on the work carried out to date by the Scrutiny Panel that is investigating this topic.

Scrutiny Lead Members: Councillors Clack, Wilkinson and Wolff

Executive Lead Member: Councillor Colin Cook – Board Member for City Development.

Recommendations;

- 1. To note and comment on the work of the Panel to date;**
- 2. To recommend continuation of the Panel’s work into the next work programme.**

Introduction

- 1** The last meeting of the Communities and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee received a briefing note from the High Street Panel concerning its focus.
- 2** The Committee noted the Panel’s proposed scope and that it intended to look at two District centres in more detail – Headington and Cowley Road.
- 3** It was agreed that:-

- (a) The Panel should, as its next step, talk to traders in both centres in order to obtain a sense of what was good and what was bad about each area;
- (b) The issue could be carried forwards into the next Council/Scrutiny year if necessary.

Progress to date

- 4 The Panel has met and agreed that it will, over the next few weeks, contact traders in the 2 District Centres chosen – Cowley Road and Headington. It was decided that it was important to have a framework of questions to be asked to ensure consistency. This could be in the form of a survey/questionnaire, and advice is being sought from the Consultation Officer before any work begins.

Initial questions

- 5 It had been agreed at the last Committee meeting that the Panel would talk to traders to find out “what is good and what is bad about your area”. The Panel felt that it is important to concentrate on the area as this is something over which the Council can have some influence. It wishes to need to narrow down the questions to focus on positives and negatives for each area. So these are the proposed **starting point** questions:-

- (a) Why did you choose to come to this area?
- (b) Has it worked for you and met your expectations?
If yes, can you say how?
If no, can you say why not?
- (c) Do you think that the location of your business has an influence over the success (or otherwise) of your venture?
- (d) What do you think are the strong points of your location? What do you gain?
- (e) What do you think are the weak points of your area? What are the drawbacks?
- (f) Is there a business association in your area? Are you a member of it?
If yes, have you found it useful, and in what way/s?
If no, can you say why not?
- (g) What do you see as your top three issues for you (1) as traders and (2) in regards to the general area in which you trade?

(h) Any specific comments you would like to make about your District Centre?

- 6 Ideally, members of the Panel (preferably with officer support), would like to go out over the next few weeks and talk to traders within each shopping area (using a traders' association if/where they exist) to gather answers to their questions in order to gain an overall impression of what is happening in each area. This may still be done. However, given the pressure on Member and officer time, and in order to try to gather as broad a range of information and feedback as possible, the Panel would like to send out a very short questionnaire, covering the points identified above, to traders in the areas concerned.
- 7 The Panel will be able to report back to a future Scrutiny Committee when it has gathered in all the comments and answers and analysed them.

Recommendations;

1. To note and comment on the work of the Panel to date;
2. To recommend continuation of the Panel's work into the next work programme

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(On behalf of the Scrutiny Panel.)

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