

The Culture Strategy

Culture includes performing arts, buildings, museums, sports, tourism and parks. participation in cultural activities is fundamental to how people feel about where they live.



Who is asking the questions?

The Leisure and Culture Department.

What do we need to know?

We would like to know what you think about the culture strategy we have developed.

Why are we asking you?

Because you may have participated in cultural activities and have a view about culture in Oxford.

What will happen to the results?

We will use your views to make any changes to the strategy which you think are necessary.

1 Do you agree with the way that culture is defined in the strategy?

Yes No

If no, what is missing/should be left out? _____

2 The vision for Oxford is "to be renowned the world over as a leader in high quality, innovative and diverse cultural activities accessible to all"

Do you think anything is missing/needs to be added to the vision?

3 Do you agree that the priorities are the appropriate priorities for culture in Oxford over the next 5 years?

Yes No

Priorities

- Promote involvement by all in a diverse range of cultural opportunities
- Harness the potential of the creative and leisure industries as central to a vibrant City with a high quality of life.
- Support the development of a successful and sustainable cultural sector in Oxford.

4 Will the actions identified in the culture strategy delivery plan make the appropriate improvements to culture in Oxford?

Yes No Maybe

Actions

- Promote involvement by all in a diverse range of cultural opportunities
- Harness the potential of the creative and leisure industries as central to a vibrant City with a high quality of life.
- Support the development of a successful and sustainable cultural sector in Oxford.

5 Do you have any further comments you would like to make?

Additional Licensing Consultation



Who is asking the questions?

Our Environmental Health team who are responsible for licensing Houses of Multiple Occupation (HMOs) that are over 3 storeys and house 5 occupants or more. We want to know what you think about expanding the licensing scheme to cover smaller shared houses. This will mean that the council can set standards for these properties in relation to fire safety and general management.

What do we need to know?

We want your views on Oxford City Council's proposal to introduce additional licensing for HMOs throughout the city. Additional licensing will mean that landlords of shared houses will have to apply to the Council to get a licence to cover their property.. This will mean that the council can set standards for these properties in relation to fire safety and general management.

Why are we asking you?

To get a cross-section of opinion within Oxford What will happen to the results?

What will happen to the results?

The results will help us to decide the detail of the scheme and to make sure that the scheme covers the required areas.

❶ Do the areas where you live have any of the following problems? (Please tick all that apply)

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Badly managed private rented shared houses | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor property condition |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Empty properties | <input type="checkbox"/> Poor external condition of properties and gardens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Dumped refuse in and around properties | <input type="checkbox"/> Nuisance or anti-social behaviour from shared houses |

❷ Have you had problems with privately rented properties in your area in the last five years?

- Yes No

If yes please give details _____

TO LISTEN IS TO LEARN

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Do you agree with the following statements? *(Please tick)*

3 Additional licensing can have a positive effect on private rented houses in your area.

Agree Disagree Don't know

4 Poorly managed and/or maintained properties can have a negative affect on the area where you let or manage properties.

Agree Disagree Don't know

5 Landlords have a responsibility to properly manage their properties.

Agree Disagree Don't know

6 Additional Licensing will:

	Agree	Disagree	Don't know
ensure privately rented HMO properties are well maintained and managed			
help reduce anti-social behaviour			
ensure that amenity, fire precaution and repair standards are applied equally to all HMOs across the city			

7 Do you agree with Oxford City Council's proposal to introduce additional licensing?

Agree Disagree Don't know

8 If yes, what size HMO should be subject to additional licensing *(Tick all that apply)*

All HMO s/shared houses

2 Storey + 4 or more occupants

All 3 Storey

Other (please state:)



Housing and Homelessness Strategies

We are looking at how we can improve our community housing services (homelessness prevention and assistance, the provision and allocation of affordable housing and housing conditions) and want to find out your views. Part of this work includes reviewing the council's Housing and Homelessness Strategies which can be viewed on the website www.oxford.gov.uk/housing

Who is asking the questions?

The Community Housing Service Development Team who are responsible for reviewing these services.

What do they need to know?

They want to know about your experiences of community housing services and your thoughts on how to improve the housing situation in Oxford. We are not asking about our council landlord service.

Why are they asking you?

They want to know the views of the people of Oxford on community housing issues.

What will happen to the results?

The results of this questionnaire will help the Council decide what housing policies to adopt in future and how to improve existing services.

1 If you have used any of the following of the City Council's housing related services how satisfied were you?

(Please tick 1 box for each statement)

	Very	Quite	Neutral	Not very	Not at all	Don't know/not used
Helping homeless families						
Helping homeless single people						
Allocating council and housing association housing						

2 How satisfied are you with the City Council's performance on the following housing related services?

(Please tick 1 box for each statement)

	Very	Quite	Neutral	Not very	Not at all	Don't know
Providing new affordable housing						
Improving the condition of housing						

3 If you are not satisfied (not very or not at all) with any of the housing services listed above please can you briefly explain why?

4 Please indicate which are in your opinion the three most important housing issues in Oxford. Please tick 3 only. (If you tick more than three we will only count the first three.)

Lack of affordable rented housing for families
Lack of shared ownership housing for families
Too much affordable rented housing
Too much shared ownership housing
Lack of affordable rented housing for singles / couples
Lack of shared ownership housing for singles / couples
High house prices
High rents
Condition of private rented homes
Condition of council or housing association rented homes
Too many flats / not enough houses
Too many houses / not enough flats
Street homelessness / rough sleeping
Family homelessness
Lack of land in the City to build on
Lack of progress building on available land in the City
Long waiting lists for affordable housing

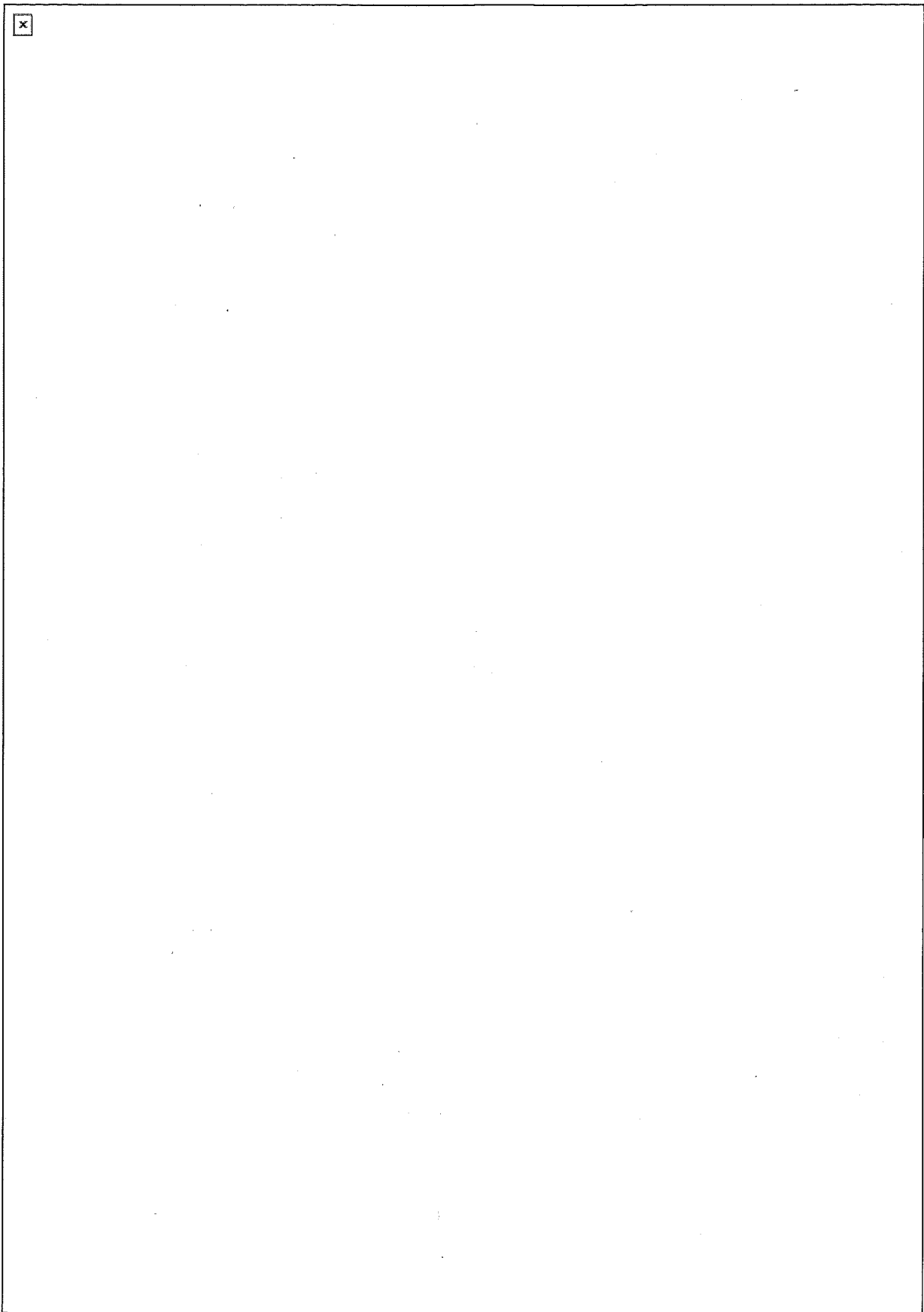
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5 In your opinion, how important are the following potential solutions to solving Oxford's housing problems?

(Please tick 1 box for each statement)

	Very	Quite	Neutral	Not very	Not at all	Don't know/not used
Build more family size houses (3 or 4 bedrooms).						
Build more family size flats (3 or 4 bedrooms).						
Build more smaller homes (1 or 2 bedrooms).						
Build more new homes in or immediately around the city.						
Build more new homes away from the city in surrounding towns.						
Other, please state below:						

6 Is there anything else you want to say about housing in the City of Oxford?



2 Another key priority is to **Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour.**

This means working towards making streets safer. This priority covers services such as those listed in the table below.

(please tick 1 box for each service)

	Very Important	Quite Important	Average	Not very Important	Not Important
Work with Neighbourhood Action Groups to implement neighbourhood policing					
Provision of CCTV					
Working with Thames Valley Police to help reduce crime					
Street Wardens					
Reducing environmental crimes e.g. fly tipping					

Please give a brief description of one thing you would like us to achieve under this priority by 2009.

3 Another key priority is to **Improve the local environment and quality of life.** This means having a sound local environment with good quality amenities. This priority covers services such as those listed in the table below.

(please tick 1 box for each service)

	Very Important	Quite Important	Average	Not very Important	Not Important
Street cleaning					
Refuse collection and recycling					
Improve the quality of parks, play areas and green spaces					
Improve security and facilities at allotments					
Tourism					
Public Health e.g. pest control, noise nuisance, food safety					
General planning policies					
Managing street trading					

Please give a brief description of one thing you would like us to achieve under this priority by 2009.

- 4 Another key priority is to **Reduce Inequality Through Social Inclusion**. This means helping communities come together through local cultural, recreational and sports activities and promoting healthy lifestyles. This priority covers services such as those listed in the table below.

(please tick 1 box for each service)

	Very Important	Quite Important	Average	Not very Important	Not Important
Working with the Primary Care Trust to promote healthy lifestyles					
Children holiday activities					
Community Centres					
Assessing and awarding housing benefit					
Grants to community and voluntary groups					
Leisure centres and swimming pools					
Initiatives such as the food bank					

Please give a brief description of one thing you would like us to achieve under this priority by 2009.

- 5 Another key priority is **More Housing, better housing for all**. This means working towards providing good quality housing and housing services. This priority covers services such as those listed in the table below.

(please tick 1 box for each service)

	Very Important	Quite Important	Average	Not very Important	Not Important
Improving the standard of our council properties					
Temporary accommodation for homeless families					
Providing advice on housing options					
Grants to improve private housing					
Rose Hill redevelopment					
Ensuring Houses in Multiple Occupation are managed responsibly					

Please give a brief description of one thing you would like us to achieve under this priority by 2009.

- 6 Another of our 6 key priorities is to be an effective and responsive organisation providing better value for money. This means improving the quality and accessibility of our services. This priority covers services such as those listed in the table below.

(please tick 1 box for each service)

	Very Important	Quite Important	Average	Not very Important	Not Important
formative and interactive website					
Collecting Council Tax					
Customer services					
Planning for emergencies e.g. flooding					
Managing the Council's property portfolio					
One Stop Shops					
Area Committees					

Please give a brief description of one thing you would like us to achieve under this priority by 2009.

Appendix 3 Graphs and tables

Section 1

Q2: Which Three of the following Proposals do you think could make the biggest difference to Oxford as a cultural centre?

Proposal	Answer 1	Answer 2	Answer 3	Total	Percentage
More cultural facilities in areas that are lacking them	148	0	1	149	13.3
Improve support for visits to cultural facilities & events	49	34	1	84	7.5
Promote parks & public squares as centres for culture	115	77	39	231	20.6
Bring more world class events to Oxford	55	111	33	199	17.7
Use culture to help regenerate communities	6	55	47	108	9.6
Promote Oxford's cultural activities to attract tourism	0	34	39	73	6.5
Promote Oxford's creative industries (eg. film/design, web businesses)	2	22	27	51	4.5
Make cultural buildings accessible to all & improve access for disabled people	1	31	91	123	11.0
Make sure Oxford's cultures are represented by supporting events such as St Patrick's Day Parade or Chinese New Year	4	4	97	105	9.3
Total	380	368	375	1123	100

Question 3 How Important do you think cultural activity is to Oxford's success as a city?

	Agree Strongly %	Agree Slightly %	Neither agree nor disagree %	Disagree slightly %	Disagree Strongly %
"Culture improves the quality of life"	66	20	10	1	2
"Culture boosts tourism"	56	32	9	3	1
"Culture makes a significant contribution to Oxford's economy"	52	33	11	2	2
"Culture contributes to life-long learning & the development of skills"	49	36	10	3	1
"Culture assists individuals to build confidence & develop a sense of well-being"	44	35	16	4	2
"Culture creates better employment opportunities & prospects"	34	40	19	6	2
Culture helps urban regeneration & empowers communities"	36	37	21	4	3

Q4 Have you undertaken any of the following activities in the past year?

	Past Week	%	Past Month	%	Past Year	%	TOTAL
Visited a library	150	35.0	101	23.5	96	22.4	347
Been to a historic building or place	130	30.3	157	36.6	91	21.2	378
Been to see a film at a cinema	54	12.6	129	30.1	150	35.0	333
Been a participant in a sporting activity	104	24.2	57	13.3	84	19.6	245
Visited an art gallery or museum	68	15.9	120	28.0	153	35.7	341
Been, as a spectator, to a sporting eve	27	6.3	47	11.0	110	25.6	184
Been to a live music event	57	13.3	62	14.5	122	28.4	241
Been to a nightclub	16	3.7	18	4.2	68	15.9	102
Been to see a play	22	5.1	72	16.8	162	37.8	256
Been to a festival or event	5	1.2	23	5.4	134	31.2	162
Been to an opera or other classical music event	27	6.3	63	14.7	113	26.3	203
Been to a live dance performance	13	3.0	33	7.7	82	19.1	128
	673		882		1365		2920

Q6 Which, if any, of the following prevent you from visiting or attending more events?

	Frequency	Percentage
It costs too much	169	24
Its difficult to find the time	210	29
Not enough events local to my home	83	12
Lack of transport	49	7
I don't feel venues are accessible	35	5
I might feel uncomfortable or out of place	31	4
I'm not really interested	56	8
Other	62	9
None of these	26	4
	721	

Q7. Thinking about the local area where you live, how good do you feel your local facilities for cultural/leisure time activities are?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
	Very good	62	15	15
	Fairly good	185	43	44
	Neither good nor poor	83	19	20
	Fairly poor	55	13	13
	Very poor	32	8	8
	Total	417	97	100.0
Missing	System	12	3	
Total		429		

Section 2

Q1. Do you agree with the way that culture is defined in the strategy?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	246	57	63
	No	47	11	12
	Maybe	97	23	25
	Total	390	91	100.0
Missing	System	39	9	
Total		429		

Q.3 Do you agree that the priorities are the appropriate priorities for culture in Oxford over the next 5 years?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Yes	216	50	56
	No	33	8	8
	Maybe	139	32	36
	Total	388	90	100.0
Missing	System	41	10	
Total		429		

Section 3

Q1. Do the areas where you live have any problems?

	Frequency	Percentage
Badly managed private rented shared houses	149	19
Empty properties	62	8
Dumped refuse in & around properties	197	25
Poor property condition	120	15
Poor external condition of properties & gardens	190	24
Nuisance or anti-social behaviour from shared houses	84	11
	802	

Q3. Do you agree that additional licensing can have a positive effect on private rented houses in your area?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree	260	60.6	64.0
	Disagree	43	10.0	10.6
	Don't know	103	24.0	25.4
	Total	406	94.6	100.0
Missing	System	23	5.4	
Total		429	100.0	

Q7. Do you agree with Oxford City Council's proposal to introduce additional licensing?

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent
Valid	Agree	302	70.4	74.0
	Disagree	38	8.9	9.3
	Don't know	68	15.9	16.7
	Total	408	95.1	100.0
Missing	System	21	4.9	
Total		429	100.0	

Section 4

Q4 What are the three most important housing issues in Oxford?

	1	2	3	Total	%
Lack of affordable rented housing for families	149	0	2	151	13.0
Lack of shared ownership housing for families	12	14	1	27	2.3
Too much affordable rented housing	7	2	1	10	0.9
Too much shared ownership housing	10	7		17	1.5
Lack of affordable rented housing for singles/couples	37	46	4	87	7.5
Lack of shared ownership housing for singles/couples	6	11	2	19	1.6
High house prices	139	93	30	262	22.6
High rents	11	86	48	145	12.5
Condition of private rented homes	9	28	23	60	5.2
Condition of Council or housing association rented home	0	16	6	22	1.9
Too many flats / not enough houses	6	25	35	66	5.7
Too many houses/ not enough flats		7	8	15	1.3
Street homelessness / rough sleeping	7	27	49	83	7.1
Family homelessness	2	6	17	25	2.2
Lack of land in the City to build on	2	13	39	54	4.7
Lack of progress building on available land in the City	1	9	20	30	2.6
Long waiting lists for affordable housing	0	1	87	88	7.6
				1161	100

Q5. How important are the following potential solutions to solving Oxford's housing problems? (Frequency)

	Very	Quite	Neutral	Not Very	Not at all	Don't Know
Build more family sized homes (3 or 4 bedrooms)	122	99	47	39	23	38
Build more family sized flats (3 or 4 bedrooms)	64	96	67	55	39	41
Build more smaller homes (1 or 2 bedrooms)	124	110	42	24	24	33
Build more new homes in or immediately round the city	99	87	55	38	46	31
Build more new homes away from the city in surrounding towns	104	103	70	25	30	30
Other	15	1	4	0	3	19

Section 5: What is Important to You?

In the final section of the survey the panel were asked their opinion on key measures within the council's six corporate priorities.

Climate Change (frequencies)

	Preventative work on Flooding	Tackling pollution	Energy saving advice and grants	Invest in energy efficiency for our buildings	Park and ride	Planning policies to protect the environment
Very important	278	248	187	211	156	238
Quite important	86	121	150	119	148	111
Average	35	21	53	56	75	39
Not very important	4	6	9	7	11	8
Not important	2	0	1	2	8	1
Total	405	396	400	395	398	397
Missing	24	33	29	34	31	32

Reduce crime and anti-social behaviour

	Work with Neighbourhood Action Groups to implement neighbourhood policing	CCTV	Working with Thames Valley Police to help reduce crime	Street Wardens	Reducing environmental crimes eg. fly tipping
Very important	191	147	247	141	203
Quite important	126	112	112	161	137
Average	64	84	25	65	50
Not very important	11	36	10	18	7
Not important	6	18	3	13	2
Total	398	397	397	398	399
Missing	31	32	32	31	30

Improve the local environment and quality of life

	Street cleaning	Refuse collection & recycling	Improve the quality of parks, play areas & green spaces	Improve security & facilities at allotments	Tourism	Public health eg. pest control, noise, nuisance, food safety	General planning policies	Managing street trading
Very important	287	351	199	87	59	205	116	82
Quite important	99	44	155	128	149	132	153	125
Average	17	6	39	126	130	55	103	136
Not very important	2	2	3	41	33	7	15	42
Not important	0	0	2	16	24	2	4	14
Total	405	403	398	398	395	401	391	399
Missing	24	26	31	31	34	28	38	30

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Reduce inequality through social inclusion

	Working with the Primary Trust to promote healthy lifestyles	Children holiday activities	Community Centres	Assessing & awarding housing benefits	Grants to community & voluntary groups	Leisure centres & swimming pools	Initiatives such as the food bank
Very important	170	147	159	115	134	187	93
Quite important	161	151	161	127	151	145	135
Average	52	81	66	121	92	60	119
Not very important	13	14	7	19	13	4	23
Not important	3	7	5	8	8	4	16
Total	399	400	398	390	398	400	386
Missing	30	29	31	39	31	29	43

More housing, better housing for all

	Improving the standard of our council properties	Temporary accommodation for homeless families	Providing advice on housing options	Grants to improve private housing	Ensuring Houses in Multiple Occupation are managed responsibly	Rose Hill development
Very important	181	190	123	118	225	118
Quite important	158	124	161	135	125	135
Average	47	65	92	86	36	86
Not very important	9	8	11	20	4	20
Not important	1	6	3	16	3	16
Total	396	393	390	375	393	375
Missing	33	36	39	54	36	54

Be an effective and responsible organization

	Informative & interactive website	Collecting Council Tax	Customer services	Planning for emergencies	Managing the Council's property portfolio	One Stop Shops	Area Committees
Very important	95	173	181	221	125	73	86
Quite important	164	141	152	131	192	138	122
Average	105	72	63	43	73	134	141
Not very important	20	8	3	5	8	31	23
Not important	10	9	0	2	3	16	20
Total	394	403	399	402	401	392	392
Missing	35	26	30	27	28	37	37

Summary of Oxford Staff Consultation: One in Ten Sessions

The Aims of the Consultation:

- To establish the types of services favoured by staff, as well as those that are not considered essential.
- To generate discussion on the future direction of the council, the types of services that should be prioritised and those that should not.
- To involve staff with the planning of services for the future.
- Thus the overall aim was to gain ideas for efficiencies as well as to consult staff about their priorities for the council budget.

Social Research Associates findings:

The information and suggestions obtained from the staff consultation has been detailed and complex and thus difficult to summarise. The headline results which show the greatest degree of agreement are listed below. Interestingly these have synergies with the results of the Citizens Panel also held in recent weeks.

Reduce inequality through social inclusion

- Review and rationalise leisure centres including investigation of outsourcing and charging structures.
- Be more selective about support for community centres and voluntary groups.

More housing for Oxford, better housing for all

- Provide more affordable housing and jointly continue to reduce homeless claims

Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life

- Charge more for and improve the standard of public toilets.
- Charge higher fees for licensing private landlords and other environmental services (e.g. rodents, removal of large refuse).

Reduce crime and antisocial behaviour

- Be 'tougher' on benefit fraud.

Tackle climate change and promote environmental resources management

Be an effective and responsive organisation, providing value for money services

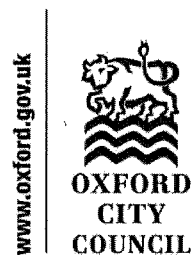
- Transfer some service obligations to others (e.g. Healthy Living to NHS, crime prevention to police and business).
- Abolish or reduce Area Committees.
- Encourage cross departmental and inter Council working and communication, thus reducing duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Introduce a Council wide information processing and IT strategy including the need for more efficient communication with off site workers.
- Develop internal training and opportunities for career progression rather than employing new staff and consultants.

Oxford Staff Consultation: One in Ten Sessions

December 2007



Presented to: Oxford City Council



Presented by:
Social Research Associates
www.sraltd.co.uk
January 2008



Oxford Staff Consultation: One in Ten Sessions

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Oxford Staff Consultation: One in Ten Sessions

Executive Summary

On 4th and 5th December c 150 staff representing all Council departments took part in discussions about Council budget priorities, views about spending reallocation and opportunities for efficiency savings. Staff were welcomed by Peter Sloman, the Chief Executive, who also attended the feedback at the end of each session. Overall 16 workshops were held over four sessions lasting three hours, facilitated by independent consultants, Social Research Associates.

Staff who participated were also asked to use prepaid postcards to encourage their colleagues to add views. This resulted in a further 150 responses representing overall participation by a fifth of Council staff from a spread of all departments and grades.

Each session was welcomed by Peter Sloman, the Chief Executive who also attended the feedback. There were also presentations outlining the six Council as well as details of the proposed budget for each priority. Exercises and discussions then took place and the sessions concluded with feedback to senior officers and the Chief Executive.

The information and suggestions obtained from the staff consultation has been detailed and complex and thus difficult to summarise. The headline results which show the greatest degree of agreement are listed below. Interestingly these have synergies with the results of the Citizens Panel held a few weeks earlier.

- Review and rationalise leisure centres including outsourcing and charging structures.
- Charge and improve the standard of public toilets.
- Be more selective about support for community centres and voluntary groups.
- Transfer some service obligations to others (e.g. Healthy Living to NHS, crime prevention to police).
- Charge higher fees for licensing private landlords and other environmental services (e.g. rodents, removal of large refuse).
- Be 'tougher' on benefit fraud.
- Provide more affordable housing and conjointly continue to reduce homeless claims.
- Abolish or reduce Area Committees.
- Encourage cross departmental and inter Council working and communication, thus reducing duplication and unnecessary bureaucracy.
- Introduce a Council wide information processing and IT strategy.
- Develop internal training and opportunities for career progression rather than employing new staff and consultants.

The staff consultation has been widely welcomed and an estimated quarter of all Council staff have actively participated whilst others have joined in discussions with colleagues on an informal basis. Inevitably some staff are cynical and don't expect anything to change, but the majority have taken the exercise very seriously and made detailed suggestions. Consequently, there is widespread interest in the response of senior management and feedback is awaited. Many staff also welcome the promise that this is not a one off exercise but a continuing and iterative process.

Oxford Staff Consultation: One in Ten Sessions

1 Introduction

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Staff who participated were also asked to use prepaid postcards to encourage their colleagues to add views. This resulted in a further 150 responses. Thus about a fifth of all Council staff have been actively involved in the consultation, representing a good spread of departments and grades.

This report summarises the results of the consultation which will be followed by a further communication from the Chief Executive providing feedback about what will happen as a result of the issues raised.

2 The Aims of the Consultation

- To establish the types of services favoured by staff, as well as those that are not considered essential.
- To generate discussion on the future direction of the council, the types of services that should be prioritised and those that should not.
- To involve the staff of Oxford City Council with the planning of services for the future.

Thus the overall aim was to gain ideas for efficiencies as well as to consult staff about their priorities for the council budget.

3 The Consultation Process

3.1 The Workshops

Overall 16 workshops were held over four sessions lasting three hours, facilitated by independent consultants, Social Research Associates.

Each session was welcomed by Peter Sloman, the Chief Executive who also attended the feedback. Peter said that the Council budget would contract in real terms whilst at the same time the public's expectations of Council services were rising. Therefore efficiency savings and smarter ways of working were essential. He also emphasized that these could only be achieved with the support of the Council and the co-operation and active participation of staff – hence the consultation exercise which was the beginning of a continuing process.

There was then a presentation outlining the six Council priorities given by the Peter McVitie, Head of Policy, Performance and Communications and this was followed by details the proposed budget for each priority by Sarah Fogden, the Chief Finance Officer. These presentations are shown at Appendix A.

Staff were then invited to consider changes in the context of a chart showing the current budget allocations which were divided into statutory and discretionary spending for each priority (shown at Appendix B). Ideas for efficiencies which would enable services to improve within current budgets were also discussed.

The final part of the session involved reporting back some of the conclusions to the wider group and the Chief Executive.

3.2 Extending the Consultation to other staff

Staff attending were invited to discuss the issues raised in the workshops with others and to fill in postcards with the comments of up to nine colleagues (Appendix C). This resulted in a further 100 responses.

The summary below is thus an amalgamation of all the consultation processes based on notes from the workshops, the results of the allocation exercise and additional comments received subsequent to the attended sessions.

4 Results in the context of Council Priorities

Summary

Not all the groups completed the budgeting exercise which many felt was too broad brush given the diversity and complexity of the myriad of Council services, especially within the time allowed. In contrast the area of most interest and suggestions related to internal Council working arrangements. However there were also many comments and suggestions concerning Council services to the public which are summarized under the six Council priorities below.

4.1 Reducing inequality through social inclusion

Budget: Overall the majority of groups reduced budget expenditure in this area of priority especially in relation to leisure centres.

Leisure Services

Leisure services were seen as one of the best opportunities for rationalisation and efficiencies. Whilst accepting their value there was widespread agreement that some elements could be just as well provided by the private sector and that current services were not all in the right place or offering the right type of sports at the right time.

- Reduce amount of leisure centres and especially expensive water provision which is no longer popular especially with young people – a large bowling centre would be more popular.
- Rationalise leisure centres – some in wrong place and underutilised – build larger facility.
- Raise more income from sponsorship and promote/improve centres to achieve higher use/charges.
- Review pricing policy and move towards a more commercial charging structure.
- Need for more focused marketing of leisure services to fulfil social objectives such as obesity and social isolation.
- Social objectives could be combined with commercial provision via concessions policies.
- Advertise centres to achieve better usage and income e.g. more prominent advertising in front of the ice rink so it can be noticed.

Benefits

It was recognised that the high percentage of students in Oxford made it difficult to keep track of benefit claims and that some landlords were taking advantage of this situation.

There was also felt to be a general problem of overpayment.

- There's a lot of fraud and no resources to catch it before the payment goes out – it's then taken up by DWP and our team gets subsumed – it's demoralising.
- Restrict grants and put more emphasis on reducing fraudulent claims and ineligible payments especially in multi occupancy tenancies – take a 'tougher stance' especially at the entry stage (much harder to retrieve overpayments).
- Why does it take three weeks to register a change of address?

Community Centres/Voluntary Groups

The role of voluntary groups was felt to be one which would become more important as the Council acted as an enabler rather than a direct service provider. Achieving this would involve a change of emphasis to training and encouraging partnerships, and less on the provision of community centre buildings.

- Not all support needed – some could be self funding and there are alternative sources of income – scope for reduction and rationalisation – support tends to be incremental rather than strategic.
- We should have more control of what goes on in community centres and run them more strategically.
- There's too many community centres – lots of older buildings in a bad state – we need less of better quality.

Healthy Living

There was a general view that these services should be the responsibility of the NHS and that it was an area in which the Council could reduce expenditure.

- People know about what they should be eating and not smoking – it's not for the Council anyway – their doctors can tell them.
- I realise poor people are less healthy but there's limits to what 'nanny state' can do about it.
- There's enough advice on the TV.

4.2 Housing

Budget: Most groups left this area of spending unchanged but with redistribution from higher charges to landlords to more on affordable housing.

There was quite a lot of confusion about the role of the Council in providing and funding housing – not surprising in the light of recent changes and new legislation. Some staff were critical of other Councils and organisations that encourage homeless people to move to Oxford. There was also much discussion about private sector landlords with many supporting higher and more extensive charging regimes for licensing and inspections. There was also support for more enforcement of tenants' responsibilities to reduce maintenance costs.

- Income stream could be tapped more efficiently – e.g. by charging higher fees for licensing private landlords – charges currently fixed for 5 years and too low e.g. £800 for 5 years for a five bedroom multi-occupancy house.
- Bring more landlords into the inspection and licensing system.
- Provide more affordable housing to reduce the Homelessness budget – a good example of the prevention approach and 'spending to save' – this would also challenge the landlords many of whom offer a very poor and expensive service.
- Sheltered accommodation offered too readily due to lack of interim alternatives especially for elderly.
- Need more smaller units for older people to encourage them to move from larger houses which could be better used by families.
- Colleges should provide more student accommodation and thus free up lettings for local people especially as students don't pay Council Tax.
- Be stricter on collection and determining who is a student in mixed use housing – thus identifying those who are not students and should pay Council Tax.

4.3 Local environment, economy and quality of life

Budget: Half the groups cut this budget by advocating charges, penalties or efficiencies.

This area of Council priority led to a wide range of efficiency suggestions especially in the areas of energy conservation, recycling and property management. Charging more for use of council properties was frequently advocated – both in terms of income generation but also to enable better long term maintenance. There was also support for penalties for residents who failed to recycle or remove rubbish and litter.

- Charge for toilets and provide better quality service.

- Recycling – regime too complex for people to cope with – should liaise with other Councils to share sorting machinery on regional basis.
- Introduce incentives for people to reduce the quantity of rubbish and use community refuse areas.
- Introduce set hours for refuse workers.
- Parks – should get more support from County and rationalise provision.
- Tourist Information Centre – get more support especially from the Universities.
- Give grants to save energy in Council owned property and housing.
- Park and Ride – County should pay for all but also generally discourage use on environmental grounds even though this would reduce revenue.
- More provision needed for coaches.
- Street cleaning and pavement maintenance needs improving.

4.4 Crime and antisocial behaviour

Budget: Redistribution or reduction advocated in favour of transferring responsibilities to the police and others.

This was another area of expenditure (along with health) which staff felt should be the responsibility of the police and also the private sector rather than the Council.

- Why both PCSOs and Street wardens? – don't need both.
- Crime prevention including wardens and CCTV should be responsibility of police.
- Insurance companies and the private sector – especially the big stores and clubs should provide these services.
- The Universities should contribute more to crime prevention.
- The courts should use community sentences to make offenders clean up graffiti and vandalism.
- The Council should use licensing policy to tackle disorder in the evenings.
- Money should be switched from CCTV to better lighting – it's been shown to be a more effective way of reducing crime and it's better for reassuring the public too.

4.5 Environmental resource management and climate change

Budget: neutral due to improvements in efficiency and encouragement of actions by other stakeholders.

An overriding view in relation to environmental problems especially climate change was that it was too big an issue for the Council to have much impact on their own and should be tackled in partnership with a lead from central government. In the case of flood damage it was generally felt that insurance companies should pay towards major works. There was also support for relocating the climate change team into different Council departments so that good practice was integrated into all service sections.

- Council should make more profit on disposal of property and land – they should sell with planning permission or build on their own land instead of letting developers reap the profit.