

SCRUTINY REPORTS FOR CITY EXECUTIVE BOARD - WEDNESDAY 17 DECEMBER 2014

Agenda No Item

6. **Scrutiny Report: Clean Streets**
6. **Scrutiny Report: Older Person's Housing Review**
7. **Scrutiny Report: Asset Management Strategy- Council housing stock**
9. **Scrutiny Report: Discretionary Rates Relief for Businesses Policy**



INVESTORS
IN PEOPLE



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To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 December 2014

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Clean Streets

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Scrutiny Committee on the work of the Streetscene Service and waste and recycling collections in the city centre.

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Craig Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor John Tanner, Executive Member for Cleaner, Greener Oxford, Climate Change and Transport

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018 - Cleaner, Greener Oxford

Recommendations:

1. That consideration is given to how street cleaning can be sufficiently resourced whilst the Streetscene Service responds appropriately to future flooding events.
2. That the street cleaning service standards are circulated to elected members, so that any Member requests for additional work can be costed and considered within the current budget round.
3. That clarification is provided as to what legal powers the City Council has to ensure the removal of graffiti from privately owned properties. Any guidance provide (e.g. online, written correspondence) should be reviewed and updated accordingly.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered a report that addressed scrutiny members' concerns about street cleaning performance, littering, waste collections in the city centre and graffiti. The Committee would like to thank Doug Loveridge, Streetscene Services Manager, and Geoff Corps,

Waste and Recycling Service Manager, for attending the Committee to support this discussion.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Scrutiny Committee is very supportive of the work of the Streetscene Service and the Waste and Recycling Service, and commended the responsiveness of officers to member concerns.
3. The Streetscene Services Manager explained that resources were diverted away from street cleaning activities from February-April 2014 in order to focus on deep-cleaning flood affected areas. The Committee recognised the importance of responding to flooding events but felt that street cleaning activities should not be unduly affected as a result of these efforts.

Recommendation 1 - That consideration is given to how street cleaning can be sufficiently resourced whilst the Streetscene Service responds appropriately to future flooding events.

4. The Committee supported efforts to rationalise commercial waste collection times in the City Centre and asked officers to keep collection hours under regular review to see whether the window could be further restricted, especially in the morning. The Committee was also supportive of a review of bins and noted that the Streetscene team does have a small supply of additional bins.
5. The Committee commented that there remain problems in certain main streets around the City and that officers should be encouraged to identify (as part of the annual budget process) where additional resources are needed.
6. Members requested further details about the frequency and scheduling of street cleaning in different areas of the city.
7. The Streetscene Services Manager offered to speak or walk about with individual members, and extends this offer to all City Councillors.

Recommendation 2 - That the street cleaning service standards are circulated to elected members, so that any Member requests for additional work can be costed and considered within the current budget round.

8. Graffiti on private property remains a significant challenge. Members felt that the City Council's guidance could be more consistent, and that clarity should be provided about what powers the City Council currently has, including any powers to remove graffiti without permission.

Recommendation 3 - That clarification is provided as to what legal powers the City Council has to ensure the removal of graffiti from

privately owned properties. Any guidance provide (e.g. online, written correspondence) should be reviewed and updated accordingly.

Director and Board Member Comments

- 1) As the public understands, at times of emergency such as flooding, it is vital that City Council staff are deployed to safeguard life and property. Sometimes this will mean some street cleaning being postponed until after the emergency is over.
- 2) I am very happy to ask officers to circulate streets cleaning standards to be circulated to all councillors.
- 3) The City Council has no powers to remove graffiti from privately owned properties without the written consent of the owner. In practice unless the graffiti is offensive we will only do so at the owner's expense. Further details about the City Council graffiti policy are available on the website at:
http://www.oxford.gov.uk/PageRender/decEH/Graffiti_Removal_occw.htm

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List of background papers: None

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 December 2014

Report of: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Title of Report: Older Persons Housing Review

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present comments from the Housing Panel on the Older Persons Housing Review

Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Sam Hollick

Executive lead member: Councillor Scott Seamons, Executive Member for Housing and Estate Regeneration

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018; Meeting Housing Needs

Recommendations:

- 1. That residents are surveyed face to face and that the City Council seeks to involve Oxford Brookes University in conducting these surveys. Tenant volunteers should also be closely consulted throughout the review.**
- 2. That the scope of this review is expanded to include older persons living in their own homes and to those in privately rented housing. Consideration should be given to how best to do this, perhaps using sample surveys.**
- 3. That the timescale of the review is extended by 6 months (to September 2015). If required, additional resources should be allocated in the current budget round to enable this.**
- 4. That the review is focused on understanding the future requirements of people at the younger end of the 'Older Persons' category, so that the City Council can plan to best meet their future needs.**
- 5. That the Board Member prioritises the creation of new social housing for single older people if the review provides evidence that this could reduce under-occupancy or meet the current or future requirements of older tenants.**

6. That a Steering Group is established to oversee the review, and that this group includes at least two elected members.

Introduction

1. The Housing Panel considered a briefing on the Older Persons Housing Review at its public meeting on 10 December 2015. The Panel would like to thank Allison Dalton for supporting this item.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Panel recognised that surveying older residents to understand their housing requirements should be done with a high degree of sensitivity. Face to face surveys would therefore be more preferable than online or written surveys.
3. The Panel supports the idea of involving Oxford Brookes University in conducting the face to face surveys. Tenant volunteers should also be utilised as they can provide a valuable and familiar link to older tenants.

Recommendation 1 - That residents are surveyed face to face and that the City Council seeks to involve Oxford Brookes University in conducting these surveys. Tenant volunteers should also be closely consulted throughout the review.

4. The Housing Panel came to the view that City Council should be seeking to maximise the possible future benefits of conducting a review into housing for older people by expanding the scope of the project to include older people living in privately-owned or rented accommodation.

Recommendation 2 - That the scope of this review is expanded to include older persons living in their own homes and to those in privately rented housing. Consideration should be given to how best to do this, perhaps using sample surveys.

5. The Panel commented that the timescale for the project seemed short, even with the existing scope. The Panel is in favour of a longer and deeper review and feel that appropriate resources should be allocated to delivering this.

Recommendation 3 - That the timescale of the review is extended by 6 months (to September 2015). If required, additional resources should be allocated in the current budget round to enable this.

6. The Panel recognised that many older residents will not want to move in any circumstances. While seeking to survey as many older residents as possible, the panel felt that there is potentially a lot of value in

understanding the requirements of those who are approaching older age. This can better inform longer term planning.

Recommendation 4 - That the review is focused on understanding the future requirements of people at the younger end of the 'Older Persons' category, so that the City Council can plan to best meet their future needs.

7. The Panel also commented that where single older tenants are under-occupying and would consider moving, there is a lack of suitable accommodation available for them to move in to. The panel noted that the new units being developed at Barton are predominantly 2 and 3 bedroom accommodation.

Recommendation 5 - That the Board Member prioritises the creation of new social housing for single older people if the review provides evidence that this could reduce under-occupancy or meet the current or future requirements of older tenants.

8. The Panel agreed that elected members should have the opportunity to be involved in overseeing this project and recommend the establishment of a member steering group.

Recommendation 6 - That a steering group is established to oversee the review, and that this group includes at least two elected members.

Further consideration

9. The Panel agreed to monitor progress after 3 months and to consider the findings of the review.

Director and Board Member Comments

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List of background papers: None

Version number: 1

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 December 2014

Report of: Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

Title of Report: Asset Management Strategy – Council Housing Stock

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present recommendations from the Housing Panel on the Asset Management Strategy – Council Housing Stock.

Key decision Yes

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Sam Hollick

Executive lead member: Councillor Scott Seamons, Executive Member for Housing and Estate Regeneration

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018; Meeting Housing Needs

Recommendations:

- 1. That the City Council reviews whether it is doing all it reasonably can to ensure that tenants leave their homes in good condition before vacating them.**
- 2. That the City Council strengthens partnership working to ensure that the advice and materials provided to tenants by the City Council and other agencies is joined up and consistent.**
- 3. That the City Council reviews whether mould is a recurring issue in the stock condition survey, and ensures that where mould occurs, it is treated effectively.**
- 4. That the City Council ensures that information about the National Home Swap scheme is made available to tenants who are under-occupying, in addition to other options.**

Introduction

- 1. The Housing Panel considered the Asset Management Strategy – Council Housing Stock at its public meeting on 10 December 2014. The**

Committee would like to thank Martin Shaw and Allison Dalton for assisting this wide-ranging discussion.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Housing Panel support the Strategy and the direction of travel it provides.
3. The Panel reviewed what the strategy says about void property repairs and felt that the wording on page 13 could be stronger than 'encourage tenants to leave their home in a good state of repair'. Members sought assurances that the City Council does all it can within the resources available to ensure that houses are in good condition when left vacant. The Panel recognises that the City Council would not want to hold deposits, and that recharges can be difficult to recover after the event, so the focus should be on working with tenants prior to properties becoming vacant.

Recommendation 1 - That the City Council reviews whether it is doing all it reasonably can to ensure that tenants leave their homes in good condition before vacating them.

4. The panel discussed heating and ventilation and noted that where new heating systems are installed, it is vital that residents are shown how to use them correctly. It was also noted that agencies such as Age UK advise older residents to keep their windows closed. The Panel sought assurances that the City Council works closely with such partners to ensure consistency of such communications.

Recommendation 2 - That the City Council strengthens partnership working to ensure that the advice and materials provided to tenants by the City Council and other agencies is joined up and consistent.

5. Members questioned how widespread the problem of mould is across the Council's housing stock. Members commented that it has been known for mould to be painted over and sought assurances that this was not common practice.

Recommendation 3 - That the City Council reviews whether mould is a recurring issue in the stock condition survey, and ensures that where mould occurs, it is treated effectively.

6. The Panel recognise the need to make better use of the Council's existing housing stock and questioned whether information about the National Home Swap scheme is made available to tenants who are under-occupying.

Recommendation 4 – That the City Council ensures that information about the National Home Swap scheme is made available to tenants who are under-occupying, in addition to other options.

7. Officers agreed to look into issues with night light systems that have installed in communal areas.

Further consideration

8. The Housing Panel will monitor delivery against the aims set out in the strategy. The panel will also consider the Council's Energy Strategy, Private Sector Housing Policy and its approach to under-occupancy in due course.

Director and Board Member Comments

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List of background papers: None

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 17 December 2014
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Discretionary Rate Relief Policy

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present comments from the Scrutiny Committee on the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy.

Key decision? Yes

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Craig Simmons

Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown, Executive Member for Customer Services and Social Inclusion

Policy Framework: Corporate Plan 2014-2018 - Efficient, Effective Council

Recommendation:

That non-profit making organisations are clearly encouraged to contact the City Council for an early assessment of whether they may be entitled to discretionary reliefs.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Discretionary Rate Relief Policy for non-domestic rates. The Committee would like to thank Tanya Bandekar, Service Manager for Revenues and Benefits, and Stephen North, Senior Revenues Officer, for attending the Committee to support its discussion.

Summary of the discussion

2. The Committee heard that it is a prudent time to review this policy because there have been a number of changes to reliefs over recent years. Since the report was published, further changes to retail reliefs were announced in the Chancellor's Autumn Statement.
3. The Committee asked whether the City Council takes class action. Members were advised that officers will alert the Valuation Office to issues

such as car park closures, and would encourage Councillors to make them aware of similar localised issues.

4. The Committee heard that discretionary reliefs are considered on a case by case basis, taking the interests of local residents and Council Tax payers into account. The Panel felt that we could look to tighten up the policy where rate relief is discretionary. With this in mind, the Panel referred the report to the Local Economy Scrutiny Panel for further consideration.
5. The Committee commented that non-profit making organisations need to be better able to anticipate whether they will be entitled to reliefs. Officers advised that they would encourage such organisations to make contact with the team to discuss their circumstances. The Committee welcomed this approach and felt that this could be made clearer in the policy.

Recommendation - That non-profit making organisations are clearly encouraged to contact the City Council for an early assessment of whether they may be entitled to discretionary reliefs.

Further consideration

6. The Local Economy Scrutiny Panel will consider this policy further as part of a review of how City Council policies and services support the local economy.

Director and Board Member Comments

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List of background papers: None