

Scrutiny Committee reports for City Executive Board - Thursday 17 November 2016

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 - a) Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2015/16 (Pages 3 - 6)
 - b) Digital Strategy (Pages 7 - 10)

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 17 November 2016
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2015/16

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2015/16.

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Executive lead member: Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory Services

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2015/16 at its meeting on 7 November 2016. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Hollingsworth, Board Member for Planning and Regulatory, the Planning Policy Manager and the Planning Policy Officer for attending the meeting and answering questions.

Summary and recommendation

2. Cllr Hollingsworth, Board member for Planning and Regulatory Services presented the report. He explained that the Annual Monitoring Report monitors the effectiveness of the Council's planning policies; the report will influence the Local Plan review due next year.
3. The Committee discussed student numbers and student built accommodation, Officers explained the Council's policy which allows only 3,000 students from both Oxford Brookes and Oxford universities from living outside of student

accommodation and the penalty for exceeding this policy. The policy includes only accommodation fully owned and run by Brookes or Oxford universities and does not extend to language schools or other educational institutes in the city. The Committee sought assurances that the review of the Local Plan would consider ways to expand the policy to include other educational institutes.

4. Oxford Brookes University currently has over 3,700 students living outside of student accommodation and the continuing growth in university numbers means that the Council will have to refine its policy to adjust to the growth in student numbers. The Committee are supportive of officers commissioning work with Cambridge City Council to review the growth of academic institutes and meeting with Oxford and Oxford Brookes universities to discuss changes to the current policy so that it is fit for purpose for the next 20 years.
5. The Committee questioned the Council's failure to meet its retail targets. Cllr Hollingsworth explained that the Government has made a number of changes to permitted development rights and it is now very difficult for the Council to prevent retail shifting from one use class to another. The Council will have to consider alternative ways to manage retail as policies in the Local Plan will no longer be sufficient.
6. The Committee sought assurances on the following issues in the report: the shortage of supply of short stay accommodation, affordable housing figures, the viability of the affordability housing policy and the increase in retrospective HMO planning applications. The Committee queried whether indicator 26: Natural Resources Impact Analysis related specifically to renewable energy, as indicated in the wording of the target, in which case it would not have been achieved, or whether it also included non-renewable low carbon sources of energy (e.g. heat pumps), in which case the wording should reflect this. The Committee recommended that clarity should be provided either way. This was accepted and wording of the target was amended in the final paperwork presented to CEB.
7. The Committee questioned the relevance of monitoring indicator 33: Traffic growth at inner and outer cordons which measures the traffic flow in and out of the city. The Committee heard that the data comes from Oxfordshire County Council and provides context for other policies. Nevertheless the Committee would like the City Executive Board to justify the need to monitor this indicator as the City Council can't influence it in any way.

Recommendation 1 - That consideration is given to whether or not indicator 33: Traffic growth at inner and outer cordons should be included in future Annual Monitoring Reports, and that reasons are provided either way.

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List of background papers: None

Suggested City Executive Board response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Planning Annual Monitoring Report

Provided by the Board Member for Planning and Regulatory

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agreed? (Y / N / In part)</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<p>1. That consideration is given to whether or not indicator 33: Traffic growth at inner and outer cordons should be included in future Annual Monitoring Reports, and that reasons are provided either way.</p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p>Yes, as with all indicators in the AMR we will continue to review whether or not the data reported is useful. In this instance we believe that the inclusion of the inner and outer cordon point data is a useful and relevant piece of information for the Council to consider when it comes to its planning policies and when dealing with strategic planning issues that go beyond the city's boundaries as part of fulfilling our 'duty to co-operate'. For example, when evaluating sites to meet the City's unmet housing need, this data is highly relevant. The traffic data leads the City Council to a preference for sites on the edge of the city with ample public transport, walking and cycling provision over sites further away and without such provision, such as the recently proposed Chalgrove Airfield site.</p>

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To: City Executive Board

Date: 17 November 2016

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Digital Strategy

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on the Digital Strategy.

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny Committee

Executive lead member: Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the five recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee pre-scrutinised the Digital Strategy at its meeting on 7 November 2016. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services and the Digital Development Manager for attending the meeting and answering questions.

Summary and recommendation

2. The Digital Development Manager presented the report. The Digital Strategy sets out how the Council will use technology to improve services to residents and business. The Strategy has a customer focus and will look to provide automated services (for those who wish to use them) and broaden the range of services provided to customers using digital channels.
3. The Committee discussed the challenges of making services accessible for people who don't use computers. The Committee received assurances that the Council wouldn't be stopping services to those who are not online and that officers would still be available for members of the public to talk to. The Strategy

was about making more services accessible on-line. Technology was also recognised as increasing inclusiveness, through enabling people with disabilities to access council services online. The Committee welcomed the fact that the new Council website met AA accessibility standards and suggested a number of groups and individuals the Council could engage with around online accessibility, such as the student disability community and the University of Oxford's Accessibility Advisor.

Recommendation 1: That the Council consults with disability groups on improving the accessibility of online council services.

4. The Committee noted that the Strategy did not extend to visitors to Oxford, they felt that as many search engines directed visitors to the Council website there was a need for the Strategy and Action Plan to outline how the Council would direct these visitors to tourist providers.

Recommendation 2: That the Digital Strategy and Action Plan considers the needs of visitors to Oxford, in particular how the Council website could direct visitors to tourist providers.

5. The Committee felt that the planning part of the council website was quite difficult to navigate and improving this should be a priority in the Action Plan. The Committee heard that the planning software was provided by a national provider and that it would be a challenge to make significant improvements until such a time as the contract was due for renewal.

Recommendation 3: That the Council prioritises improving the ease of use of online planning services, and includes this longer-term aim in the Action Plan.

6. The Committee thought it would be beneficial to have access of the Council website at the community centres so that people without computers could access council services online.

Recommendation 4: That consideration is given to whether the Council's website could be more accessible from community centres.

7. The Committee thought the Digital Strategy could help transform how the Council engaged with its customers. The Committee suggested there may be scope to combine the Digital Strategy with the Community Engagement Strategy.

Recommendation 5: That consideration is given to whether the Digital Strategy could be combined with the Community Engagement Strategy in future.

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List of background papers: None

Suggested City Executive Board response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Digital Strategy

Provided by the Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

Recommendation	Agreed? (Y / N / In part)	Comment
1. That the Council consults with disability groups on improving the accessibility of online council services.	Y	The involvement of representative groups, alongside using national best practice for digital accessibility, will be used to action the commitment in the Strategy and Action Plan
2. That the Digital Strategy and Action Plan considers the needs of visitors to Oxford, in particular how the Council website could direct visitors to tourist providers.	Y	We will review the current provision on our website. Our mobile app already includes a 'find my nearest' function for visitors to Oxford.
3. That the Council prioritises improving the ease of use of online planning services, and includes this longer-term aim in the Action Plan.	In Part	<p>Planning is one of the most popular services accessed by the public through our website. In common with a significant number of other local authorities we use a national leading software system to achieve this.</p> <p>Some action has already taken place to discuss potential improvements with our software supplier. In addition, we are actively talking to other local authorities that may have developed their own interface to this software, that we could work with.</p> <p>It is suggested this recommendation is actioned instead as a separate feasibility project within the ICT workplan.</p>
4. That consideration is given to whether the Council's website could be more accessible from community centres.	N	This would have significant resource implications and would need to be considered as part of the Community Centre Strategy.

<p>5. That consideration is given to whether the Digital Strategy could be combined with the Community Engagement Strategy in future.</p>	<p>N</p>	<p>While there are undoubtedly enhancements to engagement that can arise from using digital channels, there are a wide range of successful methodologies that do not (and should not) use such channels. For example, our successful Rose Hill Community Centre project demonstrated the impact of face-to-face engagement to involve the public in our work.</p> <p>It is proposed that the two Strategies remain separate to ensure a focus on their intended areas is retained, but that both Strategies and Action Plans includes a commitment to using digital channels to improve and enhance citizen engagement.</p>
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