

Scrutiny Committee reports for City Executive Board - Monday 16 October 2017

7. Scrutiny Committee Reports

Scrutiny Committee reports and City Executive Board responses have been submitted for the following items:

- a) Assessing disabled impacts in planning (Pages 3 - 8)
- b) Oxford Design Review Panel (Pages 9 - 14)
- c) Recycling (Pages 15 - 18)
- f) Item 12: Review of Financial Inclusion Strategy (Pages 19 - 22)

Scrutiny has also considered, but has not submitted recommendations on, the following items:

- Item 8: Review of Discretionary Housing Payment Policy
- Item 9: Draft Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptions Policy
- Item 10: Regulating the Private Rented Sector
- Item 11: Lucy Faithful House
- Item 15: Annual Monitoring Report 2016-17

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 16 October 2017
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Assessing disabled impacts in planning

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present recommendations from Scrutiny on how the Council fulfils its duty to assess the impacts on disabled people of new developments and changes of use.
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Planning and Regulatory Services
Corporate Priority:	Meeting Housing Needs and Strong and Active Communities
Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the seven recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices
None

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee commissioned a report from the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services on how the Council fulfils its duty to assess the impacts on disabled people of new developments and changes of use, including for businesses and private and social sector housing. The Committee considered this report at a meeting on 7 September 2017.
2. The Committee would like to thank Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, and Ian Wright, Environmental Health Service Manager, for providing the report and answering questions. The Committee would also like to thank Cllr Marie Tidball (who originally suggested this item) and Alex Donnelly, for addressing the Committee as witnesses.

3. The Environmental Health Service Manager introduced the report. He noted in particular the fact that healthy life expectancy is not keeping pace with increased life expectancy which has ever increasing consequences for the buildings we use and live in. He also set out the three legislative areas that underpin this work - planning policy, building regulations and the Equalities Act 2010. He said that the Council's planning policies, which require that all new homes are built to the Lifetime Homes standard, exceed national requirements and those of many other local authorities.
4. Alex Donnelly spoke as a blind resident who is interested in matters of public access. He said the latest data suggested that the national figure for the proportion on the population experiencing a long term health problem or disability that limited their day to day activity is now just over 20%. He noted that there is an undisputed link between disability and poverty; the Joseph Rowntree Foundation estimate that 50% of people with disability live in poverty. Inclusive design is often seen in the context of structural changes for those with particular needs but this is a false assumption; good, accessible design is of value to everyone. Investment in good, accessible design should not just be seen as a cost but, rather, as an investment. The policy requirement that 5% of all new dwellings should be designed as wheelchair accessible seems a low aspiration and the Council could go further. Alex concluded by noting that, in the case of large public buildings, as someone who was blind, having clearly identified information points is vital.
5. Cllr Tidball had initiated the commissioning of this report when she was a member of the Committee and thanked the authors for it. She was pleased to see that Oxford was setting an example by going over and above the requirements but suggested that there was probably scope for further development. She suggested that the Committee might wish to consider making three recommendations about:
 1. The setting up of bespoke consultation sessions with disabled members of the community and organisations to feed into the Local Plan.
 2. Contacting the DCLG asking them to exhort others to follow Oxford's example. If 18%+ of the community experience some kind of disability, the building estate should reflect that - but it does not.
 3. Approaching businesses and estate agents encouraging them to embrace inclusive design

Summary and recommendations

6. The Committee thanked officers for providing an excellent report and welcomed the helpful contributions made by the two witnesses. The Committee noted the points they raised and agreed to put forwards the recommendations suggested by Councillor Tidball about consulting with disabled people and making representations to government and other stakeholders about the importance of inclusive access.

Recommendation 1 – That the Council consults with disabled users and organisations in the context of the emerging Local Plan.

Recommendation 2 – That the Council contacts the Department for Communities and Local Government asking them to:

- a) ***Review the application and impacts of part M of the Building Regulations and whether these regulations and optional standards go far enough in light of the latest demographic data;***

b) Promulgate good practice in terms of disabled access and inclusivity to local authorities.

Recommendation 3 – That the Council makes representations to landlords, estate agents and developers about the importance of creating an inclusive housing market.

7. The Committee considered the Council's Accessible and Adaptable Homes policy in light of the comments made by Alex Donnelly and Cllr Tidball. This policy requires that planning permission will only be granted where all proposed new dwellings meet the Lifetime Homes standard and that on sites of 4 or more new dwellings, at least 5% of these (or at least 1 dwelling for sites with fewer than 20 homes) are either fully wheelchair accessible or easily adaptable for full wheelchair use. The Committee would encourage the Council to raise the threshold for wheelchair access if evidence suggests that this would ensure future housing needs will be met.

Recommendation 4 – That as part of the Local Plan review the Council reviews whether planning policy HP2 requires that a sufficiently high proportion of new dwellings are either fully wheelchair accessible or easily adapted for full wheelchair use, in order to meet future housing needs in the city, or whether the 5% threshold should be raised.

8. In response to a question about planning enforcement, the Committee noted that there is no authoritative means of monitoring the 5% target for new buildings to be wheel chair accessible or easily adaptable for full wheelchair use. To some extent it is a case of trusting that development projects overseen by private approved inspectors (as opposed to the Council's own building control surveyors) are compliant with the planning policy requirement.

Recommendation 5 – That where possible, the Council monitors compliance with planning policy HP2 (or any equivalent policy that replaces it following the Local Plan review).

9. The Committee considered the issue of disabled access in existing private sector accommodation and noted that the Council has no powers to require retrospective improvements. It was however identified that there are opportunities for the Council to do more to influence the private sector, such as through the licensing of houses in multiple occupation (HMOs), as well as the landlord forum and accredited landlord scheme (recommendation 3).

Recommendation 6 – That the Council encourages higher standards of disabled access and inclusivity through HMO licencing. This could include capturing data from inspections and making recommendations to landlords on good practice.

10. The Committee noted that the Council has a good story to tell in terms of promoting disabled access and questioned whether there was more the Council could do in terms of proactively identifying and embedding good practice. The Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services said that this was a fair challenge and that there was still more to be done to strengthen the service.

Recommendation 7 – That the Council continues to look at good practice from other local authorities to inform further improvements to planning and regulatory services, including with regards to disabled access and inclusivity.

Further consideration

11. The Committee agreed to request that officers to provide a further update in a years' time.

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City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on disabled impacts in planning

Provided by the Board Member for Planning & Regulatory Services

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1. That the Council consults with disabled users and organisations in the context of the emerging Local Plan.	Yes	The Council already has a number of organisations and community groups who are consultees for planning policy changes such as the Local Plan. Officers recently met with Unlimited Oxfordshire to discuss a range of issues including the Local Plan and are happy to increase consultation with disabled users and organisations.
2. That the Council contacts the Department for Communities and Local Government asking them to: a) Review the application and impacts of part M of the Building Regulations and whether these regulations and optional standards go far enough in light of the latest demographic data; b) Promulgate good practice in terms of disabled access and inclusivity to local authorities.	Yes	
3. That the Council makes representations to landlords, estate agents and developers about the importance of creating an inclusive housing market.	Yes	This requires a broad approach across the Council, as these organisations are often dealt with by different departments and under different strategies. Officers will consider how best to have a single statement of best practice, charter or similar that can be used with these different groups.
4. That as part of the Local Plan review the Council reviews whether planning policy HP2 requires that a sufficiently high proportion of new dwellings are either fully wheelchair accessible or easily adapted for full wheelchair use, in order to meet future housing needs in the city, or whether the 5% threshold should be raised.	Yes	This is best considered as an additional submission to the Preferred Options consultation, and will be considered alongside all other responses.
5. That where possible, the Council monitors compliance with planning policy HP2 (or any equivalent policy that replaces it following the Local Plan review).	Yes	Where the Building Control Service are the inspecting authority they will ensure that new buildings comply with Part M of the Building Regulations, including where

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		planning conditions have been imposed to comply with relevant planning policies relating to accessibility and adaptability.
6. That the Council encourages higher standards of disabled access and inclusivity through HMO licencing. This could include capturing data from inspections and making recommendations to landlords on good practice.	Yes	<p>The nature of a licence and the process of licensing is that the conditions for that licence only ensure compliance with housing legislation. It is not therefore possible to require something that cannot be used as a condition of the licence. This means that the statement of best practice – as described in answer to Q3 above – would be advisory only.</p> <p>However the regular contact between officers and HMO landlords and the educational work through Landlords Forums offers an opportunity to help promote best practice. The proposed new enhanced inspection scheme for the broader private rented sector (PRS) offers a similar opportunity in the rest of the PRS.</p>
7. That the Council continues to look at good practice from other local authorities to inform further improvements to planning and regulatory services, including with regards to disabled access and inclusivity.	Yes	The aim of the Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Service is to be Best in Class and so benchmarking, innovation and seeking out best practice is carried out on a regular basis. This might also be done as part of a process of regularly reviewing the statement of best practice.

To: City Executive Board
Date: 16 October 2017
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford Design Review Panel

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations on the Oxford Design Review Panel
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Planning & Regulatory
Corporate Priority:	Strong, Active Communities; Vibrant, Sustainable Economy; Cleaner, Greener Oxford
Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices
None

Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee commissioned a report from the Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services on the operation of the Oxford Design Review Panel (ODRP). The Committee considered this report at a meeting on 7 September 2017.
2. The Committee would like to thank Patsy Dell, Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services, for providing the report and attending the meeting. The Committee would also like to thank the following people for addressing the committee as expert witnesses:
 - Debbie Dance, Oxford Preservation Trust;
 - Kevin Minns, Minns Estates;
 - Ian Green, Oxford Civic Society.

3. Debbie Dance, speaking as a representative of Oxford Preservation Trust welcomed the report. She noted the desirability of introducing some means of weighting the projects coming before the ODRP. Consistency of approach and panel membership was important; there was evidence that both of these were lacking. The lack of heritage expertise on the panel was a concern; it was frequently regarded as an afterthought and should factor in panel discussions at an earlier stage. Heritage and conservation were as important as design.
4. Kevin Minns, speaking as a developer from an applicant's point of view, welcomed the ODRP as a constructive mechanism for peer review. He noted the importance of challenging misunderstandings at panel hearings and not waiting until after the event. Given the complexity of many schemes it was important that panel members received papers in good time to ensure informed discussion which was not possible if only seen on the day of the hearing. He echoed the point previously made about the importance of consistency. There needed to be clarity to all concerned that the ODRP was an advisory and not a decision making body.
5. Ian Green, speaking on behalf of the Oxford Civic Society, said that he wanted the built environment to improve. The ODRP was a relevant and appropriate mechanism for contributing to that. He suggested that it would be helpful to start to put in place a means of evaluating the Panel's effectiveness and to see if it had made a positive contribution to the built environment. He was concerned that the panel's awareness of a project's context was not always as great as it should be, particularly when not in a conservation area. Site visits were always important. Continuity for repeat reviews was essential. He also noted the importance of the advisory nature of panel being clear. In his view panel meetings should be open and texts of decisions made public as soon as possible.

Summary and recommendations

6. The Committee welcomed the report and voiced support for the ODRP. In discussion the Committee noted that the ODRP is cost-neutral to the Council because applicants are charged for reviews. Design review is seen as being normal practice in a city such as Oxford and many other cities have an equivalent process. Developers don't have to engage with the ODRP but are advised that planning committees would expect them to, so by not engaging they added risk.
7. The Committee noted that a lack of local knowledge and heritage expertise on the ODRP is seen as potential weakness, given that many development schemes have heritage impacts. The Committee suggest that consideration is given to how the ODRP can have a better depth of appreciation of a development scheme's local context and heritage impacts when undertaking reviews. This is especially but not only important for developments within conservation areas. The Committee also note that the ODRP's independence is a key feature and benefit of the panel and that its independence not be compromised.

Recommendation 1 – That the ODRP has (or has access to) on-going heritage expertise where schemes are in conservation areas or adjacent to or affect listed buildings in order to better understand the local heritage context of development schemes, and that consideration is given as to how this can best be achieved.

8. The Committee noted the comments about the need for consistency of membership when designs come back to the panel for repeat reviews. This would help to ensure

fairness and consistency of approach. It is recognised that there is a requirement for the same chair to be in place and that efforts are made to ensure other panel members are the same but this is not always possible. The Committee suggest that consistency of membership should be built in to ODRP reviews as far as possible.

Recommendation 2 – That consistency of the ODRP’s membership is guaranteed as far as possible for repeat reviews.

9. The Committee agreed that an evaluation of the impacts of the ODRP on Oxford’s built environment would be a useful exercise and questioned whether the work of the ODRP was mainly of benefit to more affluent parts of the city. The Head of Planning, Sustainable Development and Regulatory Services said that a whole range of schemes including schools and civic building go through the design review process and that good design belongs to everyone. The Committee suggest that an evaluation of the impacts of the ODRP should include some form of social impact.

Recommendation 3 – That proposals for a review of the effectiveness of the ODRP should be drawn up that includes a social impact element.

10. The Committee questioned how proposed development schemes are chosen for review by the ODRP and heard that planning officers and elected members can nominate schemes at the pre-application stage. The Committee commented that many members may not know they are able to do this. The Committee suggest that members are made aware of how to nominate schemes for review by the ODRP.

Recommendation 4 – That elected members are alerted to the fact that they may submit suggestions for review by the ODRP.

11. The Committee also commented that, at the pre-application stage, elected members may not be aware of development proposals that affect their wards and which they may wish to refer to the ODRP. The Committee suggest that consideration is given to how members can be routinely alerted to pre-application proposals affecting their wards.

Recommendation 5 – That a mechanism is established to alert Councillors to pre-application proposals in their Wards, recognising that pre-application discussions are normally confidential and that this notification may only happen with the prior-agreement of the scheme developer/promoter.

12. The Committee discussed the status of the ODRP and noted that only planning committees can make planning decisions. The ODRP has an important advisory role that sits in the pre-application stage of the planning process. On balance, the Committee’s view was that ODRP meetings should not be open to the public because that would serve to elevate the status of the Panel and may discourage developers from engaging. The Committee also heard that panel members want a confidential space in which to consider development proposals. The Panel’s advice is made public at the point when a planning application is submitted. The Committee suggest that the advisory status of the ODRP and the non-binding nature of its advice should be made clear to key stakeholders.

Recommendation 6 – That the advisory status of the ODRP and its advice is made clear to planning committees, elected members and the public.

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City Executive Board response to the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on the Oxford Design Review Panel

Provided by the Board Member for Planning & Regulatory Services

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1. That the ODRP has (or has access to) on-going heritage expertise where schemes are in conservation areas or adjacent to or affect listed buildings in order to better understand the local heritage context of development schemes, and that consideration is given as to how this can best be achieved.	Yes	The Council and CABE will be reviewing this over the next twelve months, looking at options and consequences.
2. That consistency of the ODRP's membership is guaranteed as far as possible for repeat reviews.	In part	Agreed, but with the proviso that this is not wholly in the control of the Council as it depends on third parties and their availability.
3. That proposals for a review of the effectiveness of the ODRP should be drawn up that includes a social impact element.	Yes	The next 12 months will be used to review the effectiveness and operation of the ODRP across a range of criteria
4. That elected members are alerted to the fact that they may submit suggestions for review by the ODRP.	Yes	A guidance note will be sent to all members setting out the principles for design review and which type, scale and nature of schemes would normally go through a design review process; it will also make clear the independent position of the ODRP, and the relationship between the Panel, the Council and the developer/applicant.
5. That a mechanism is established to alert Councillors to pre-application proposals in their Wards, recognising that pre-application discussions are normally confidential and that this notification may only happen with the prior-agreement of the scheme developer/promoter.	In Part	Pre-application proposals are confidential, and can only be made public with the prior agreement of the applicant. Officers will also need to consider how such proposals – which would sit outside the normal automated planning application notification workflow – could be notified to members without the need for a cumbersome or manual workaround. Any system that relied on individual officers having to notify members manually would be at risk of human error, and would likely be unsatisfactory.
6. That the advisory status of the ODRP and its advice is made clear to planning committees, elected members and the public.	Yes	This would be covered by the same guidance note referred to above, which would be made publicly available.

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To: City Executive Board
Date: 16 October 2017
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Recycling

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations on recycling rates and recycling incentive schemes
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member	Councillor James Fry, Chair of Recycling Panel
Executive Board Member:	Councillor John Tanner, Climate Change and Cleaner Greener Oxford
Corporate Priority:	A Clean Green Oxford
Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report	

Appendices
None

Introduction and background

1. The Scrutiny Committee established in 2013/14 a review of recycling rates led by Councillor Fry. A report to the City Executive in July 2014 recommended resources to support targeted educational campaigns to encourage recycling and the trialling of a community incentive campaign. Following this, the Council bid successfully for government money to fund the Blue Bin Recycling League recycling reward scheme for 3 years, from October 2015 to October 2018.
2. The Committee has continued to monitor recycling rates each year. A visit to the Cowley Marsh depot took place on 21 September 2017 for scrutiny members to receive a presentation and monitor progress and performance. The meeting was attended by Councillors Fry, Gant and Lygo. They would like to thank Maria Warner, Recycling Team Leader, for organising the session and Ian Bourton, Motor Transport and Fleet Manager, Alex Mates, Recycling Promotions Officer, Stuart Guest and Ray Wild, Recycling Liaison Officers, for hosting the session.

Summary and recommendations

3. The Panel found that the Council's recycling percentage rate for the year to date (August 2017) is 51.29%, which is the first time the figure has been over 50%. This is over 2% higher than a year ago and over 4.5% higher than 2 years ago. It puts the Council in the top 25% of local authorities for recycling nationally and first compared to similar cities, which is an excellent result.
4. The recycling rate has been boosted by increased recycling of organics (food and garden waste), which are up 9.5% on the year. It is hoped that food recycling will continue to increase given that residents can now use any type of bag in their kitchen caddy, not just the relatively expensive biodegradable caddy liners.
5. The figure for residual 'landfill' rubbish (which is actually incinerated) per household is 157.3kg, down 10.56kg from a year ago. Overall, the volume of rubbish collected is down by 525.61t (-6.29%) and recycling is up 86.78t (+1.59%).
6. The panel heard that 10% of households in the city have now pledged to take part in the Blue Bin Recycling League. The Recycling Team have knocked on 13,000 doors and visited 14 schools. Voter turnout in the choice of local beneficiaries averaged 26% and £9,200 has been donated to local charities and community events. Local dry recycling rates had increased by between 4.28% and 11.70% across the city.
7. The £350k of grant funding the Council received in 2015 to run the Blue Bin Recycling League over 3 years funds 3 recycling promotion officer posts plus the prize money and other costs associated with the scheme. Proposals would be put forward in the budget round to continue with an equivalent level of resource for recycling promotion activities moving forwards. The plan is to keep the Blue Bin Recycling League but to make some changes to the organisation and value of the financial incentive for residents.
8. The Panel voiced their support for the development of these proposals (Scrutiny has previously recommended that every effort is made to continue to fund recycling promotion activities). The panel encouraged officers to think about what more could be achieved with an additional officer post and to consider making that case in a more ambitious budget bid.
9. In discussion the Panel also noted that:
 - Maintaining a quality recycling operation requires excellent service, infrastructure and communications.
 - Simple messages about recycling work best.
 - The Recycling Team work closely with planning, licensing, the HMO team and the Great Estates team (e.g. for the tower block refurbishment project) and are a statutory consultee on the waste aspects of major planning applications.
 - The Council app is proving to be more popular than the text messaging service.
 - The Council has little control over other commercial waste operators in the city centre.
 - The student liaison officer would be proactively engaging with new students from October.

- Contamination remains an issue at blocks of flats but a flat bin audit has been undertaken and street crews regularly inspect bin sheds.
 - The Council still receives recycling credits (from Oxfordshire County Council) but now has to pay for disposal of dry recyclate (the value of which has dropped significantly), resulting in a net financial loss.
 - There is a national issue with packaging which often causes confusion about which materials can and cannot be recycled.
 - Language is a barrier for some communities but there are plans to address this by dropping the use of text where possible.
 - There are plans to trial placing awareness notices on lampposts.
10. In discussion a number of suggestions were made about additional promotional activities and other improvements that could build on the already impressive performance of the Recycling Team.

Recommendation – That, alongside the previous recommendation about making every effort to continue to fund recycling incentive campaigns beyond October 2018, the work of the Recycling Team is broadened to build on the Team’s already impressive performance. This could include:

- a. Expanding school visits to try to reach every school in the city;***
- b. Co-ordinating volunteer recycling champions in schools and communities;***
- c. Running an incentive scheme for students based on competition between campuses;***
- d. Creating awareness videos, e.g. showing what happens to different materials once they have been recycled;***
- e. Facilitating more trips to waste disposal facilities for members of the public, which are so popular they are booked up until April 2018;***
- f. Proactive engagement with landlords, both directly and through the forum;***
- g. Trialling a ‘moving out campaign’ where the Council offers to collect waste at the end of students’ tenancy for a one off fee, with a view to potentially rolling this scheme out to other residents, subject to capacity and demand;***
- h. Improving the visual appearance of public bins, e.g., by using different colour schemes for recycling and other waste or installing recycling bins with holes the shape of drink cans, as is done in other countries, etc.;***
- i. Considering how to communicate the issue of litter in the city centre to the public in a way that is sensitive to the fact that Oxford is a major tourist destination;***
- j. Simplifying the message of what is and what is not recyclable, using images where possible;***
- k. Reviewing good practices from other local authorities, especially well performing Welsh authorities;***
- l. Considering the case for making the temporary British Heart Foundation bins installed around the city a permanent feature.***

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City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on Recycling

Provided by the Board Member for Climate Change and Cleaner Greener Oxford

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Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>Recommendation – That, alongside the previous recommendation about making every effort to continue to fund recycling incentive campaigns beyond October 2018, the work of the Recycling Team is broadened to build on the Team’s already impressive performance. This could include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Expanding school visits to try to reach every school in the city; b) Co-ordinating volunteer recycling champions in schools and communities; c) Running an incentive scheme for students based on competition between campuses; d) Creating awareness videos, e.g. showing what happens to different materials once they have been recycled; e) Facilitating more trips to waste disposal facilities for members of the public, which are so popular they are booked up until April 2018; f) Proactive engagement with landlords, both directly and through the forum; g) Trialling a ‘moving out campaign’ where the Council offers to collect waste at the end of students’ tenancy for a one off fee, with a view to potentially rolling this scheme out to other residents, subject to capacity and demand; h) Improving the visual appearance of public bins, e.g., by using different colour schemes for recycling and other waste or installing recycling bins with holes the shape of drink cans, as is done in other countries, etc.; i) Considering how to communicate the issue of litter in the city centre to the public in a way that is sensitive to the fact that Oxford is a major tourist destination. 	<p>Yes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. We have a programme of contacting schools to increase our visits. Any links/contacts would be gladly received. We’ve also had 2 more recycling games made (from local social enterprise, RAW Workshop) b. This is something we will explore c. This is something we will explore d. This is something we’d like to do – watch this space! e. We currently offer almost monthly tours, which are fully booked until April next year! We will continue to offer these trips and signpost groups and schools to Ardley ERF (which offers free tours to anyone in Oxon) f. We’re presenting at the Landlord Information Exchange on Thursday 19th October and offer free recycling education to anyone in Oxford g. This is something we will explore. Officers will investigate the feasibility and consider a financial appraisal of extending the proposed moving out campaign h. This is something we will explore and will be done in conjunction with Streetscene and Clean Green campaigns i. Agreed we should continue to offer bins in the city centre. k. We’re always keen to learn best practice from others. Some of the team will be attending the LARAC Conference next month, which will provide an opportunity to learn from other council recycling teams l. BHF banks are well used. Where practicable and suitable we would support permanent siting of BHF

<p>j) Simplifying the message of what is and what is not recyclable, using images where possible.</p> <p>k) Reviewing good practices from other local authorities, especially well performing Welsh authorities.</p> <p>l) Considering the case for making the temporary British Heart Foundation bins installed around the city a permanent feature.</p>		banks.
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To: City Executive Board
Date: 16 October 2017
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Financial Inclusion Strategy 2017-2020

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations on the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2017-2020
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny
Executive Board Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Customer and Corporate Services
Corporate Priority:	A Vibrant, Sustainable Economy, Strong and Active Communities
Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report	

Appendices
None

Introduction

1. The Scrutiny Committee considered the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2017-20 at a meeting on 9 October 2017. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown, Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services, and Paul Wilding, Revenue and Benefits Programme Manager for presenting the report and answering questions.
2. The Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services said that a need has been identified to support people transitioning to the Universal Credit (UC) benefit system. Because UC is paid in arrears, these people will face a gap in their benefit payments of typically five or six weeks and in some cases up to ten weeks. This will be very problematic for families who are already struggling, particularly in the lead up to Christmas. The Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) has offered to provide loans to bridge this gap but these only equate to half of what people are entitled to and the repayment mechanism is quite harsh. The Council is making

£50k available to provide emergency support during this period and will need to develop a policy quickly to ensure that this support can be delivered effectively.

Summary and recommendations

3. The Committee noted that a consequence of the transition to UC is an increased risk that people will be unable to sustain tenancies. As well as causing hardship for families, this could create costs for the Council. The Revenue and Benefits Programme Manager said that it was difficult to know exactly who would be affected and when. The Council was proactively engaging with private sector landlords to raise their awareness of UC. Many landlords now refuse to accept UC recipients and the Council does not want to further disincentivise them. The Council is also communicating to tenants, for example about what information they need to provide to prevent extended delays in their benefits payments. The DWP had provided councils with some funding which is being used to fund additional officer resource and communications campaigns.
4. The Committee asked about the reporting burden UC places on individuals and whether adequate support mechanisms are in place to assist people with the online system. The Revenue and Benefits Programme Manager said that the Welfare Reform Team is working closely with the Contact Centre and Jobcentre Plus. The evidence required for UC is comparable with Jobseekers Allowance. It will be less burdensome for certain groups of claimants who are currently in receipt of Income Support. Feedback about the online system is broadly positive but the move to a digital platform is a big change. Local authorities are expected to provide 'universal support', including help with making and managing claims and personal budgeting support (which the Council is currently publicising). More broadly, the 'headwinds' are very challenging and there are underlying issues, for example with mental health provision, that are beyond the Council's ability to solve.
5. The Committee questioned what forms the emergency support will take and how the £50k figure was derived. The Revenue and Benefits Programme Manager said that there is no written framework yet but that the support will take the form of benefit in kind rather than cash payments. The Council will draw on good practice from local emergency support schemes elsewhere in the country. The figure of £50k was informed by discussions with another local authority but it is difficult to anticipate at this stage what the level of need might be. The Committee supported the revised strategy and the provision of an emergency support scheme.

Recommendation – That further funding is identified for emergency support if £50k is found to be insufficient to cover the essential living costs of people migrating to Universal Credit.

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City Executive Board response to the recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee on the Financial Inclusion Strategy 2017-20

Provided by the Board Member for Customer and Corporate Services

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
That further funding is identified for emergency support if £50k is found to be insufficient to cover the essential living costs of people migrating to Universal Credit.	Y	I am happy to note the request for priority to be given to this if required.

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