

# Scrutiny Committee Reports for Cabinet - Wednesday 13 November 2019

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 November 2019  
**Report of:** Housing Panel (Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)  
**Title of Report:** Community Led Housing Delivery and Approval to dispose of land for housing

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Housing Panel recommendations concerning the Community Led Housing Delivery and approval to dispose of land for housing
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing Panel
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Meeting Housing Needs
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2021
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 07 November 2019, the Housing Panel considered the report on Community Led Housing delivery and approval to dispose of land for housing.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Dave Scholes, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, for supporting the

meeting and compiling the report, and Charlie Fisher of Transition by Design for supporting the meeting.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. The Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley, introduced the report. It was explained to the Panel that the report sought to do two things: to provide an update on the progress made against the actions recommended in a previously commissioned report on how Community Led Housing could be delivered in Oxford, and to consider a land disposal by way of a long lease of a plot containing seven garages and a forecourt at Champion Way in Littlemore.
4. Regarding the actions recommended to support the delivery of Community Led Housing it was noted that the majority of major actions had already been taken forward. The one area which had not progressed was the suggestion that s.106 agreements be used to require provision of community led housing sites on larger developments. The rationale behind the decision not to progress this was due to the negative implications on scheme viability and therefore the overall number of social housing projects developed.
5. Charlie Fisher of Transition by Design, one of the authors of the previously commissioned report on how Community Led Housing could be delivered in Oxford, presented to the Panel regarding the definition of Community Led Housing, which covered multiple models but all had in common a shared and communal approach regarding finance, risk and management of a scheme. The progress made by the Council against the recommended actions of the previous report were commended, and four key issues were identified as particularly important in continuing to drive the delivery of Community Led Housing forward:
  - a. Continued political support
  - b. Continued officer support, particularly with regards to the upcoming application for funding from the Oxfordshire Growth Deal in March 2020, but also in the development and contribution to the work of the Community Led Housing regional hub and its work of ensuring a pipeline of land for projects, and matchmaking suitable stakeholders to projects.
  - c. Developing a mechanism for shortlisting suitable prospective tenants from the housing register who actively wished to be involved in a housing environment with a cooperative element to it.
  - d. Ensuring that land values included social and environmental factors of potential developments. Bristol was held up as an exemplar in this regard.
6. The challenges of the proposed disposal site were explained to the Panel: its small size, proximity to the ring road, difficult access arrangements and protected trees. It was suggested that in the absence of any other developers wishing to work on the site, it would offer the opportunity to demonstrate proof of concept should it prove possible to develop through Community Led Housing.
7. In response to the report presented, the Panel commended the progress made against previous recommendations, welcomed the concept of Community Led Housing as a means of increasing social housing in the city, and endorsed the proposals regarding

the disposal of the land at Champion Way. The Panel's particular areas of discussion focused on two key areas:

- Publicity and awareness of the opportunities for involvement in Community Led Housing
- Questions regarding housing allocation and tenant-identification, bearing in mind the particular importance of having a cohesive and cooperative group to any such scheme.

8. The Committee makes two recommendations.

### **Publicity and Awareness**

9. In discussing the degree of community engagement the Champion Road project had had to date, the Panel's questioning led to discussions about wider issues around publicity and awareness of the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing, particularly amongst those outside 'co-op receptive' demographics.
10. In regards to the level of consultation on the Champion Road project, none had been undertaken to date. However, it was noted that it was still early in the process; discussions were being held about the provision of land, and that just because there had not been discussion to date, did not mean there would not be in the future. Additionally, it was noted that the location of the site meant that it was more remote, so the need for community consultation on this particular site was lower than on other sites, for example other garage sites. It was expected, with funding available to back it, that community consultation on other sites would be significantly beyond the simple statutory consultation arising from participating in the Planning process.
11. Though the Panel welcomed the news that an event was planned in January 2020 to raise the profile of and publicise Community Led Housing, it was recognised that actually the concepts of cooperative housing had been around for a long time, but that it had tended to be popular within a relatively narrow demographic. For those outside that grouping, particularly social housing tenants, the ideas and concepts of communal housing were novel to the point of being actively counter-cultural. This was a recognised area of challenge for the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust and the sector more generally. Funding of £15,000 had been received by the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust from the Cohesive Communities Fund to look at the means of engaging under-represented demographics and recruitment of a worker was due shortly.
12. It is the view of the Panel that the benefits of Community Led Housing are relevant beyond the demographic groups who are already familiar with its concepts, yet due to its novelty those who are less acquainted with the idea are unlikely to commit to it. Social housing tenants, in particular, are felt to be at risk of not engaging with the idea and therefore missing out on its benefits. It is felt that simple information-sharing is insufficient to address this issue, but must be backed up with consideration of the barriers that those encountering information about community living for the first time might encounter. Likewise, it should be recognised that those who are unfamiliar with communal living already are unlikely to attend talks at the Council on the subject, and that to ensure the message is shared to those groups it will be necessary to go out to where potential beneficiaries are to raise awareness.

**Recommendation 1: *That the Council will, when publicising and raising awareness of Community Led Housing, take steps to ensure that the barriers to demographic groups with less exposure to the concepts of communal living (particularly social housing tenants) are identified and addressed, and to ensure that these groups are equally equipped to understand the benefits of and to participate in the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing.***

## **Housing Allocation and Tenant Identification**

13. Building on conversations regarding accessibility, the Panel also sought clarification around how the particular needs of Community Led Housing schemes would interact with housing allocation, and how that might fit within the Council's broader housing provision mechanisms and obligations.
14. It was made very clear to the Panel that cooperative living can be an extremely strong model for developing resilient communities, but that realising that potential is heavily dependent on ensuring there is a shared commitment amongst members to work with one another to make the model work. Experience from the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust's six years of developing the Dean Court development in Botley showed the benefits of proactively sifting tenants to ensure they had the right mix of values, skills and motivations for the particular scheme they were seeking to join.
15. Through questioning, a number of the challenges in developing a fair and workable system within the Council's existing housing provision system were identified: balancing the demands of those in priority need with the need to ensure the best 'fit' within any particular development, the wish to involve and collaborate with as many prospective tenants as early as possible whilst ensuring the delivery retained momentum, and the implications for those people on the housing register who did not want to live in community led housing. Overall it was recognised that there was no existing plan for managing these issues and a system would need to be developed. However, there was clarity that community led housing availability was to provide more options to those on the waiting list; it would not act as a replacement for other provision, those who did not want to live communally would not be pressured into doing so, nor would they be penalised for not doing so.
16. It is recognised by the Panel that Community Led Housing can engender more engaged and resilient communities, but the creation of a community has to be proactively managed from the earliest stages to ensure that each person living communally is suited to both their neighbours and the particular needs of the scheme they are living in. Whilst it is clear that due to its responsibilities as a housing authority the Council will have an involvement in the process of allocating places in forthcoming Community Led Housing schemes, it is also recognised that the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust has expertise in understanding the workings of different schemes and community led housing models. It is felt that there is value in drawing on their learning to inform the choice of members, regardless of the system through which allocations are managed.

**Recommendation 2: *That the Council will, in identifying tenants with the values, skills and motivations suited to community living, give the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust a formal role in the selection process.***

## Further Consideration

17. On the basis that the Champion Road site is a 'proof of concept' which may, if successful, be extended to other Council-owned garage sites the Panel may wish to incorporate an update on the current project in a future work plan when the Council considers whether to make available further sites.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 07/11/2019 concerning Community Led Housing and approval to dispose of land at Champion Way.**

**Provided by the Cabinet member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p><b>1) That the Council will, when publicising and raising awareness of Community Led Housing, take steps to ensure that the barriers to demographic groups with less exposure to the concepts of communal living, particularly social housing tenants, are identified and addressed, and to ensure that these groups are equally equipped to understand the benefits of and to participate in the opportunities afforded by Community Led Housing.</b></p>	Agreed	In the nature of the projects being “community led”, we must let the hub and CLH groups take the lead on this, i.e. we will promote interest in their model(s) by highlighting and distributing their publicity.
<p><b>2) That the Council will, in identifying tenants with the values, skills and motivations suited to community living, give the Oxfordshire Community Land Trust a formal role in the selection process.</b></p>	Partial	As a Council we have a duty to ensure housing needs are met, and we will not give any provider a role in selection that could risk the “cherry-picking” of prospective tenants. I expect, however, that agreement can be reached on the CLH groups having an important advisory role.

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 November 2019  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Efficient Effective Council
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	None
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

### **Introduction and overview**

1. At its meeting on 05 November 2019, the Scrutiny Committee considered the report concerning the Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, for attending the meeting to answer questions. The Committee would also like to thank Helen Bishop, Head of Business

Improvement, for compiling the report and supporting the meeting, and Paul Adams, HR and Payroll Manager, for supporting the meeting.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. The Cabinet Member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, Councillor Nigel Chapman, introduced the report.
4. It was reported that good progress is being made in increasing the proportion of the Council's Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) employees. The number of BAME candidates is increasing and twice as many new starters are declaring that they are from the BAME community as in the recent past (18.03% in 2018/19 compared to 8.75% in 2016/17). Much more needs to be done however, both to increase the proportion of BAME employees (so as provide a closer match to City's overall demographics) and, more urgently, to increase the proportion of BAME employees holding senior positions. Similar efforts are needed to increase the proportion of women holding senior positions.
5. Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, said a "step change" is needed in relation to the employment of those from the BAME community and women as described by Councillor Chapman. To do this there would be a focus on the existing BAME and female workforce, combined with some targeted recruitment of apprentices and graduates.
6. In response to the report presented the Committee's particular areas of scrutiny focused on a number of key areas:
  - Steps to reduce structural bias in recruitment and promotion
  - Means of engaging BAME communities
  - The Council's equality duty as a company shareholder, particularly with regards to Oxford Direct Services
  - The level of non-disclosure by staff regarding sexual orientation
  - Data reliability and the impact on future targets
7. The Committee makes eight recommendations.

### **Structural bias in recruitment and promotion**

8. Though recognising the near-complete absence of BAME and relative absence of women in higher positions at the Council, the Committee welcomed the conclusion of the Head of Business Improvement that from interrogation of the data there was no single, clear cause or area of discrimination which was causing the imbalances. A corollary of this was, however, that responses to the issue would have to be holistic rather than focused, and consider less visible or easily identified forms of discrimination – structural and unconscious.
9. One particular challenge identified was that of how organisational culture could be changed to develop internal female and BAME senior managers or appoint them from outside whilst the majority of those making decisions about training, development and recruitment were white males. One suggestion presented concerned developing a

mentoring scheme for female and BAME staff drawing on internal expertise but also drawing on the relevant experience available externally.

10. Committee members queried BAME representation on recruitment panels, particularly for high-level but officer-appointed roles, such as heads of service. Such roles were recognised as being influential in shaping organisational culture, but in light of the unrepresentative demographics at the top of the Council, unconscious bias could potentially make the appointment of BAME candidates less likely.
11. Though it is noted that the Council does seek to include a diversity of representation through the makeup of its stakeholder interviews, the Committee questions whether this may be sufficient to overcome the disadvantage of unconscious bias BAME candidates face. Increased BAME representation on interview panels, brought in from externally if necessary, may be proportionate to counterbalance this disadvantage. Oxford University has been identified as a local organisation which has successfully increased the number of BAME candidates in senior positions. It is also the view of the Committee that whilst less acute an issue in the Council than BAME representation at senior levels, this reasoning could equally apply to addressing the number of women in senior roles.

**Recommendation 1: That consideration is given to the suitability of the Council's current policy in regards to BAME and female representation on officer-led recruitment panels, particularly with reference to the recruitment of heads of service.**

12. In discussion about appointments to senior roles such as Director and Head of Service, which are partially organised through recruitment agencies, the feedback that there was an expectation that shortlists should include BAME and female candidates was welcomed. It may be the case that this, and the challenging of agencies which do not offer diverse shortlists, is an example of good practice rather than a proactive decision of the Council to ensure such practice is embedded. The Committee supports a formalisation of the Council's commitment to avoiding all-male or all-white shortlists for senior positions.

**Recommendation 2: That when making appointments to Director and Head of Service level that the Council expressly shares its expectation to relevant recruitment agencies that shortlists will include women and BAME candidates.**

13. The Committee recognises the progress made in delivering training to all staff - and managers particularly - on diversity issues. It is felt, however, that further benefit would be delivered in increasing awareness of structural discrimination and ways to identify and address it. What is meant by this is the ways in which shared cultural experiences and expectations of those in a decision-making majority can coalesce into an organisational culture which unwittingly creates additional barriers to those who do not share those cultural experiences.

**Recommendation 3: That all managers, particularly senior managers, be given structural discrimination training**

14. The importance of having independent, HR-led exit interviews is also recognised as being an important opportunity to capture candid feedback on the reasons people, including women and BAME candidates, leave the organisation, and to identify areas of structural discrimination. It is felt that this is a particularly pertinent source of

information because of the likelihood that those facing structural discrimination, for example not getting promotions, are likely to leave the organisation to fulfil their ambitions.

### **Means of engaging BAME communities**

15. The Committee welcomed the efforts made to reach out to BAME communities through roadshows and CV-writing support and positive results seen in the increase in the proportion of new starters and the workforce as a whole from BAME communities. However, the Committee did also identify some suggestions for further improvement.
16. It was noted that in their roles as Lord Mayor, Deputy Lord Mayor and Sheriff the Council's civic office holders are regularly invited to meet varied communities, including BAME groups, often with significant numbers of people attending. Civic office holders are therefore well placed to share information around job opportunities at the Council with demographic target communities.
17. It is the view of the Committee that civic office holders should be enabled to contribute towards this agenda by being provided with up to date information on the opportunities available and that the provision of such information would act as an encouragement and reminder to do so.

**Recommendation 4: That briefings on current outreach and employment opportunities be provided to civic office holders, with details to include i) the support available to BAME groups to make applications to work at the Council, ii) upcoming job fairs and other events, and iii) upcoming apprenticeship and graduate placements**

18. Whilst valuable, it was felt that outreach support by the Council such as CV-writing workshops did tend to focus on particular BAME communities, and did not impact across the diversity within those BAME communities. Whilst publicising such events through umbrella organisations such as the Oxfordshire Council for Racial Equality was suggested as a partial solution, it was recognised that events providing such support do tend to attract people from a narrow range of potential beneficiaries and often from only one community group. As such, it is the recommendation of the Committee that more events, specifically BAME careers fairs, be run.

**Recommendation 5: That the Council extends the number of targeted BAME-focused careers fairs to reach different BAME communities**

### **The Council's equality duties as a shareholder**

19. In discussing the impact of the founding of Oxford Direct Services on tracking trends in the reported year on year figures, the Committee also considered what should be the appropriate response to the Council's duties and goals in its capacity as a shareholder.
20. Though recognised to be demographically different to the Council, it was discussed whether the Council should require Oxford Direct Services to adhere to the Workforce Equalities Action Plan. From discussion it was concluded that though it was the Council's role to ensure that the workforce of Oxford Direct Services did reflect the

community it serves, it should not abide by the Council's own action plan but be allowed to chart its own way to the same destination.

21. It is the recommendation of the Committee that ODS should contribute towards the Council's aims for a workforce reflective of its community, and that progress towards this should form a regular part of assessing ODS performance.

**Recommendation 6: That Oxford Direct Services is held to the same equality standards as the Council, and that it should make regular reports on actions taken towards and progress against equality goals to the shareholder**

### **Non-disclosure by staff regarding sexual orientation**

22. The Committee considered the level of non-disclosure of sexual orientation referenced in section 5(d) of the report. Though appendix 1, data table 9 did show year on year increases in the number of staff declaring as gay or bisexual and (in data table 8) that these are represented at levels significantly above the general population, nevertheless, the combined total of the 'not specified' and 'prefer not to say' categories remains high, at over a quarter (almost 27%).
23. The Committee does not draw any conclusions from this non-disclosure figure in relation to the degree to which the Council provides a LGBT-friendly workplace culture due to the multiple possible causes which may contribute towards it. It does, however, note that the figure represents a significant knowledge gap which the Council would benefit from addressing.

**Recommendation 7: To investigate the reasons for the high rate of non-disclosure over sexual orientation, and consider whether as part of that work to engage with the Stonewall Workforce Equality Index.**

### **Data Reliability**

24. Whilst the Committee recognises that the 2011 census data remains the most reliable source of information regarding the proportion of economically active local residents, it is conscious that the information is now significantly out of date meaning that actual ethnic figures may be significantly above the current level of 18.7%. It is possible that a sharp increase in the number of BAME staff members may be required to mirror the demographics of the city. It is the recommendation of the Committee that preparation be made now to support more ambitious targets in the future.

**Recommendation 8: Before new census data are released learning on which approaches are and are not successful in attracting BAME staff is captured to inform recruitment strategies.**

### **Further Consideration**

25. The Council's annual reporting on the equality and diversity of its workforce will ensure the Committee has the opportunity to include this topic in its work plan in future years. Due to the gradual nature of changes to the workforce composition, it is not expected that the topic will be revisited prior to the publication of the next Workforce Equality Report.

26. It is anticipated that the Companies Scrutiny Panel would be the appropriate forum for scrutiny of ODS equality reporting.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 05/11/2019 concerning Workforce Equality Report & Update on the Equalities Action Plan**

**Provided by the Cabinet member for Safer Communities and Customer Focused Services, Councillor Nigel Chapman**

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<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
1) That consideration is given to the suitability of the Council's current policy in regards to BAME and female representation on officer-led recruitment panels, particularly with reference to the recruitment of heads of service.	Agree	
2) That when making appointments to Director and Head of Service level that the Council expressly shares its expectation to relevant recruitment agencies that shortlists will include women and BAME candidates.	Agree	
3) That all managers, particularly senior managers, be given structural discrimination training	Agree	
4) That briefings on current outreach and employment opportunities be provided to civic office holders, with details to include i) the support available to BAME groups to make applications to work at the Council, ii) upcoming job fairs and other events, and iii) upcoming apprenticeship and graduate placements	Agree	
5) That the Council extends the number of targeted BAME-focused careers fairs to reach different BAME communities	Agree	
6) That Oxford Direct Services is held to the same equality standards as the Council, and that it should make regular reports on actions taken towards and progress against equality goals to the shareholder	Agree	
7) To investigate the reasons for the high rate of non-disclosure over sexual orientation, and consider whether as part of that work to engage with the Stonewall Workforce Equality Index.	Agree	

Date of Cabinet Meeting: 13/11/19

<b>8) Before new census data are released learning on which approaches are and are not successful in attracting BAME staff is captured to inform recruitment strategies.</b>	Agree	
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