

Supplement for

Cabinet

Wednesday 9 December 2020

6.00 pm

Scrutiny Reports

Contents

7. Scrutiny Committee Reports	3 - 24
--------------------------------------	---------------

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

This page is intentionally left blank



To: Cabinet
Date: 09 December 2020
Report of: Housing and Homelessness Panel
Title of Report: Hidden Homelessness

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Hidden Homelessness briefing
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing
Corporate Priority:	More Affordable Housing
Policy Framework:	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 05 November 2020, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered a briefing on the Council's best estimates around the prevalence of hidden homelessness in Oxford.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Mike Rowley, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, for attending the meeting and answering questions, Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homelessness Manager, for authoring and presenting the report and Paul Leo, Interim Director of Housing for supporting the meeting.

Summary and recommendation

3. Paul Wilding, Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless Manager, presented the report. By its nature, hidden homelessness is difficult to track with certainty. Since the publication of the most recent major study on hidden homelessness, the government had passed the Homelessness Reduction Act, which placed a duty on local authorities towards single homeless individuals. This single change was a solution for many of the causes of hidden homelessness.
4. Taking as a proxy for the number of people sofa-surfing the quantity of people approaching the Council Housing Options service for help under the Homelessness Reduction Act, numbers had increased by approximately 20% in comparison to the previous year. It was not possible to extrapolate from this the number of hidden homeless in Oxford, but it did indicate that services did exist to support individuals whose insecure tenancies had broken down.
5. In response to the report presented, the Panel focused its discussion on exploring the situations faced by those whose housing situations do not meet the threshold of homelessness, but are nevertheless sub-optimal. The Panel makes two recommendations around understanding and supporting those people who are sub-optimally housed.

Understanding and Supporting

6. The Panel welcomed news that, particularly in light of the passing of the Homelessness Reduction Act, mechanisms were in place to support those at risk of homelessness, including single-homeless individuals. However, there also remain a cohort of people who live in a situation which is sub-optimal, and has genuinely deleterious impacts on wellbeing, but which does not meet the threshold for support under the Homelessness Reduction Act or bandings on the Housing Register. Examples being young parents living apart from one another, being housed by their parents, or a middle aged person having to move back into their childhood bedroom. By living in spare bedrooms, such living situations do not qualify as homeless or overcrowded, leaving them with little support from the banding system of the Housing Register to reduce the waiting time for more appropriate accommodation.

The Panel fully recognises that there are challenges in knowing about such people. Whilst it can monitor issues such as sofa-surfing amongst those on the housing waiting list by virtue of the bandings on the Housing Register, it remains, overall, hard to detect and measure. Regardless of the challenges, the Panel considers this cohort of people to be in sufficiently serious a situation that the allocation of resources required to learn more about them is justified. With the current level of resources within Housing Services, it seems the most efficient means of achieving this would be through the use of external consultants to undertake research on the Council's behalf.

Recommendation 1: That the Council invests sufficient resources to gain an understanding of hidden-homelessness and sub-optimal housing,

possibly through the use of external consultants undertaking research, and begins to monitor it.

7. The experience of members of the Panel was that a high proportion of people they encountered in sub-optimal housing situations were largely resigned to their situations, thinking that the Council could not or would not be in a position to help them. Whilst it is clear that demand for social housing outstrips supply in Oxford particularly, and that – rightly – prioritisation towards those most in need occurs, the Panel does not consider this to mean that engaging with the Council is without value. Even in the event that the Council is unable to provide housing immediately, engagement with the Council can lead to support on issues such as debt and budgeting through the Council’s commissioned advice services, and unemployment support from Jobcentre Plus or the National Careers Service. As such, the Panel encourages the Council to increase understanding amongst sub-optimally housed individuals of the support the Council can provide them and generates ideas as to how those benefits might most meaningfully be communicated. It is the view of the Panel that as greater awareness of sub-optimal housing situations grow, this endeavour will be better informed so does not suggest that it must be done immediately.

Recommendation 2: That the Council, when it has sufficient understanding, undertakes a communications exercise to increase the engagement by sub-optimally housed individuals with the Council.

Further Consideration

8. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is not scheduled to hear further reports on this issue directly and is unlikely to do so helpfully without more evidence.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 05/11/2020 concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Hidden Homelessness Update

Provided by the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Councillor Mike Rowley

9

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<p>1) That the Council invests sufficient resources to gain an understanding of hidden-homelessness and sub-optimal housing, possibly through the use of external consultants undertaking research, and begins to monitor it.</p>	Partially	<p>The Council already monitors the number and types of bandings on the Housing Register and will continue to do so. However, the work required to meet this recommendation is extensive. Because this group do not meet the thresholds of any statutory services, there is no data collected about their situation by either the council, or anyone else. As such the only way to gain insight into this situation would be by undertaking extensive fieldwork. This would need to be undertaken by a professional research company in order to minimise the required field work through the use of statistical sampling techniques. Under the present financial circumstances faced by the Council, this suggestion has not been put forward as a proposal for consideration within the Council's draft budget.</p>
<p>2) That the Council, when it has sufficient understanding, undertakes a communications exercise to increase the engagement by sub-optimally housed individuals with the Council.</p>	Partially	<p>As explained above, the specific work suggested would be very extensive and cannot be committed to. However, the Council endeavours to continue promoting the support it provides to those who need it in an effective way, we and will continue to examine how awareness of its services can be improved among those who are vulnerably housed, particularly those in marginalised communities.</p>

To: Cabinet
Date: 09 December 2020
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire report
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Joe McManners, vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 01 December 2020, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships for presenting the report, and Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive, for authoring the report and answering questions.

Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report. As the Oxfordshire Growth Board had developed, so its members had sought to identify common themes and the ways in which they could work together. From the City Council's perspective, the importance of inclusivity and the need for sustainable growth were key. The document before the Committee already included elements which reflected the Council's input but this was not to say that further improvements could not be made.
4. Caroline Green, Assistant Chief Executive, said that the document did not seek to set out a specific vision for Oxford or places within the City and that the final version would have no statutory basis. It was, rather, a statement of collective ambition and common interests. A great deal of effort had been made to ensure that the document, as far as possible, reflected the diversity of places and, therefore, the different strategies and actions that might be needed to respond to those variations.
5. The Committee's discussion and suggestions in response to the report focused on work done by other relevant bodies, namely the Oxfordshire Growth Board Scrutiny Committee, greater prominence for issues around different types of inequality, clarifying a number of terms within the text, and the desirability of recognising active transport and payment of the Living Wage as strategic desiderata in Oxfordshire.
6. The Scrutiny Committee makes one recommendation, highlighting areas and topics it would like to see the Council press for inclusion within the agreed Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire.

Textual Amendments

7. The Growth Board Scrutiny Committee had had the opportunity to consider and make recommendations on the Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire on 21 October. Recommendations were made in relation to recognising the challenges in timescales aligning between policies and giving thought to addressing those, ensuring Councillors from relevant councils and broader networks were given the opportunity to comment on the draft text, and that young people in particular were to be particularly encouraged to take part in the consultation.¹ It was suggested that the Council should endorse these same recommendations.
8. Economic inequality was suggested to be the primary driver behind other forms of inequality, and that if the document were to reflect the Council's aspirations for tackling inequality in its different guises, greater emphasis would have to be paid to improving economic equality. One specific area identified by the Committee as particularly important in this was in reference to payment of the Living Wage, whether it be the national standard, or the local Oxford standard.
9. The Committee praised the recognition of health inequalities as an issue within the draft vision. However, it was suggested that too little prominence had been

¹ The full meeting minutes may be found here:
<http://democratic.whitehorsedc.gov.uk/mgAi.aspx?ID=30894>

given to mental health, and that to draw this out with the degree of thoroughness the issue deserved it would need its own dedicated section.

10. Though certain areas were felt by the Committee to require dedicated sections, inequality as a theme was suggested to be so pervasive and determinative to the outcomes of any vision for the County, that its consideration should not be relegated solely to a specific section, but that they should be woven into the substance of the document throughout. This was felt to be particularly the case for racial inequality.
11. Finally, in light of the national changes and local efforts to encourage active transport, it was suggested that the draft document underplayed the degree to which facilitating this was a strategic priority.
12. The Committee recognises that the final form of the Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire does not lie exclusively with the Council, but asks that the Council uses its best endeavours to seek that these areas are recognised and included.

Recommendation 1: That the Council seeks in its discussions at the Oxfordshire Growth Board to have the following suggestions included within future drafts of the draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire:

- **The recommendations of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel made on 21st October 2020**
- **To increase the emphasis throughout the document on economic inequality**
- **Reference within the Inclusive Economy section to the promotion of the Living Wage, either the national standard or the local standard**
- **To create a section dedicated to the improvement of mental wellbeing**
- **For issues of inequality, particularly with regards to race, to be embedded throughout the document rather than being treated in isolation under equality, diversity and inclusion.**
- **To recognise the priority of increasing active transport across Oxfordshire**

Further Consideration

13. The Committee does not anticipate any further consideration of this issue.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 01/12/2020 concerning the Draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire report

A verbal response will be provided by Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships, Susan Brown

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
<p>1) That the Council seeks in its discussions at the Oxfordshire Growth Board to have the following suggestions included within future drafts of the draft Strategic Vision for Oxfordshire:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - The recommendations of the Growth Board Scrutiny Panel made on 21st October 2020 - To increase the emphasis throughout the document on economic inequality - Reference within the Inclusive Economy section to the promotion of the Living Wage, either the national standard or the local standard - To create a section dedicated to the improvement of mental wellbeing - For issues of inequality, particularly with regards to race, to be embedded throughout the document rather than being treated in isolation under equality, diversity and inclusion. - To recognise the priority of increasing active transport across Oxfordshire 		

To: Cabinet
Date: 09 December 2020
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Workplace Equalities and Action Plan

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan report
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Joe McManners, vice-Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 01 December 2020, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services for presenting the report, and Helen Bishop, Head of Business Improvement, for authoring the report and answering questions.

Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, introduced the report. The report fulfilled a statutory requirement and the data within it were up until March 2020. The data only related to Council activity and did not include those for Oxford Direct Services (ODS). It was important as an employer that the Council should set a good example of practice in the matters covered by the report. It was important to note that the Council was now developing an improved Equality, Diversion & Inclusion Strategy, which extended well beyond just workplace equality matters. As a result of the pandemic, communication with the many and varied communities within the City had been improved and this was, in turn informing the development of that strategy. The three year workforce plan of 2018-21 had two main areas of focus, to increase the level of BAME representation in the workforce overall and to ensure that there were more women in positions of senior management.
4. Alongside the requirement to publish details about the gender pay gap, the Council had decided to publish details of the ethnicity pay gap, on a voluntary basis. In 2021 the Council would also publish details of the disability pay gap, also on a voluntary basis.
5. In relation to BAME representation, the growth of the previous year had been consolidated at about 13% at March 2020. A significant issue in relation to BAME employees was retention, with more or less equal numbers of arrivals and departures. Enquiries of the 15 most recent leavers indicated that two thirds of them had left for reasons of promotion or geography, where appropriate development or adjustments to contracts were offered. The number of BAME applicants was increasing year on year and it seemed likely that the Council's activity with communities during the pandemic would increase that number still further. About 7% (c. 60 -70 employees) of staff choose not to declare their ethnicity when asked and a good number of those may be from BAME communities.
6. In relation to women in senior positions within the organisation the position remained more or less static with no obvious likelihood of reaching the 50% level in the foreseeable future.
7. The gender pay gap data is necessarily driven by the predominance of women in lower grades. The gap is unlikely to be narrowed until there are more women in more senior positions. On a more positive note however, the pay gap is about 5% better than the national equivalent.
8. The ethnicity pay gap is, once again, driven by the distribution of employees across different roles in the Council and unlikely to be narrowed in the absence of an increase in the number of BAME employees in senior positions.
9. More work would be done on the intersectionality between the different data sets in the following year.
10. The Committee's discussion and suggestions in response to the report focused on the recording of mental illness, the granularity of ethnicity data, the benefits of exit interviews, co-production being a means of improving the Council's visibility amongst under-represented groups amongst the staff, possible reasons for non-

disclosure of race, religion or sexuality, and specific demographic groups the Council might wish to target more.

11. Though not making a recommendation regarding it, the Committee wishes it be known that it is entirely supportive of the Council's decision to publish its ethnicity pay gap and its proposals to include a disability pay gap and intersectional analysis in future iterations. The Committee considers this work to be of significant importance, and would encourage a similar exercise to be undertaken for Oxford Direct Services at a suitable point.
12. The Committee makes a total of five recommendations, making specific recommendations on ways to improve learning about the experience of minoritised groups, ways to understand the identities of the Council's workforce better, and promotion of the Council as a workplace for specific groups.

Improving the feedback from minoritised employees

13. One particularly powerful tool in hearing the experience of all staff, but those from minority groups in particular, was endorsed by the Committee: exit interviews. These were deemed central to the understanding of why people leave the organisation but for them to be effective, employees must have confidence in them. The Committee welcomed the news that the proportion of leavers taking part in exit interviews was increasing, but would like to see it become standard. The HR function's assumption of the role of 'honest broker' had been key to the progress thus far, suggesting trust is a particularly important factor. The Committee therefore encourages the Council to continue progress in building an environment in which it is natural for staff to participate in exit interviews when they leave the organisation.

Recommendation 1: That the Council continues its work to foster an environment in which staff members feel confident to participate in exit interviews as a matter of course

14. The Committee noted the efforts of the Council in recording the sexual and gender identity of staff. However, the approach taken by the Council at present did not fully reflect the diversity of options available. Implementing the practices recommended by Stonewall in its Do Ask, Do Tell report¹ would be to adopt best practice in the area and may, it is hoped, increase engagement by LGBTQ+ staff members in self-declaring.

Recommendation 2: That the Council adopts practices for recording sexual and gender insight in line with Stonewall's guidance

15. The Committee was not unanimous in its attitude towards individuals self-declaring their racial, sexual or religious identities. Some interpreted the issue as primarily being one in which staff members felt their demographic profile was not relevant to their ability to do their job (and so a positive) whilst others felt that it suggested an uncertainty over the safety in making such a declaration. The Committee was unanimous, however, in wishing that the Council could reduce

¹ https://www.stonewall.org.uk/sites/default/files/do_ask_do_tell_guide_2016.pdf

the number of people not self-declaring for negative reasons. It suggests that the first step in this work is to work out what the reasons are for non-disclosure, before being able to address those which are negative.

Recommendation 3: That the Council investigates the barriers to individuals disclosing their ethnicity, sexuality and faith-based identities

Specific Targets for Promotion of the Council as an Employer

16. The Committee's wider discussion of the fact that two thirds of recent BAME leavers had done so on the basis of promotion or geography noted a number of issues. Firstly, that the City itself is more diverse than its surrounding area; if BAME recruitment is to be increased without going outside Oxfordshire then the best payback would be promotion of the Council as an employer within the City. Whilst recruiting from an area beyond Oxfordshire would increase the number of suitable candidates, doing so would likely run counter to the Council's carbon reduction aims. The Committee considers, therefore, that promotional efforts around recruitment should be focused primarily within the City.

Recommendation 4: That the Council continues to increase the promotion of itself as an employer to those within the City

17. Whilst the high turnover of BAME candidates for promotion reasons suggests that there are other areas of work to be undertaken to increase BAME worker numbers at the Council, it is important to ensure at least that BAME workers leaving are at least replaced by other BAME workers. It is the suggestion of the Committee that the Council's recruitment approaches towards BAME women in particular may benefit from additional focus.

Recommendation 5: That the Council further develops communications and recruitment approaches to target women from minoritised backgrounds

Further Consideration

18. It is anticipated that the Committee will wish to see this item return next civic year, but no further consideration will be given in the current year.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 01/12/2020 concerning the Workplace Equalities and Action Plan report

Response provided by Cabinet Member for Customer Focused Services, Nigel Chapman

15

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council continues its work to foster an environment in which staff members feel confident to participate in exit interviews as a matter of course	Agreed	Progress to date has already increased the percentage of leavers taking up exit interviews from less than 30% to circa 55% by the end of March 2020. We wish to see this percentage increase. The more accurate information we can gather from departing employees as to their reasons the better we can tailor our policies and working practices to encourage talented individuals to stay with us.
2) That the Council adopts practices for recording sexual and gender insight in line with Stonewall's guidance	Agreed	Stonewall uses anonymous surveys and recommends taking a snapshot of employees at different parts of the employee life cycle. Hence this approach is not all about getting staff to declare, it is also about using other insight channels to understand issues.
3) That the Council investigates the barriers to individuals disclosing their ethnicity, sexuality and faith-based identities	Agreed	
4) That the Council continues to increase the promotion of itself as an employer to those within the City	Agreed	This will build on existing good practice that was in operation pre Covid where the Council was using a variety of approaches to promote job opportunities within the local community, including: holding recruitment roadshows in local community venues; attendance at local job fairs and careers events in local schools. The next cohort of apprentices will be introduced into the organisation in the coming year and will naturally provide an opportunity to

		promote the Council as a relevant and viable employer.
5) That the Council further develops communications and recruitment approaches to target women from minoritised backgrounds	Agreed	Each recruitment campaign is currently reviewed to ensure that the vacancy attracts as diverse a group of applicants as possible. Further improvements are planned to improve the skills of under-represented staff; to use local community pathways to advertise and promote opportunities and to ensure diversity at each stage in the recruitment process.

To: Cabinet
Date: 09 December 2020
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Waterways

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Waterways report
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 03 November 2020, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report it has commissioned providing an update on the work of the Council regarding the Waterways.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Supporting Local Communities, for presenting the report and answering questions. The Committee would also like to thank Jo Colwell, Service Manager, Environmental Sustainability for supporting the meeting. Finally, the Committee wishes to register its special thanks to the author of the report, Tim Wiseman -

Waterways Coordinator, for the success he has made of the role and its sadness to hear of his upcoming departure.

Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy, Oxford, said she was pleased to be able to introduce the report which recorded the positive action taken in response to the Committee's recommendations. She paid tribute to the outstanding contribution which had been made by Tim Wiseman. He had achieved "small miracles" by working closely with the City's boating community and identified a "myriad of issues" connected with the waterways for exploration and improvement. As a result of his work the relationship between the boating community and the Council was much improved and there was heightened awareness across Council departments of the potential or actual connection between them and the City's waterways.
4. The Service Manager for Environmental Sustainability went through the recommendations set out in the report and drew particular attention to some of them. The impact of the waterways on the new Local Plan had been significant and as had their impact in the consideration of individual developments. Officers across the Council were now much more aware of the value of and contribution which could be made by waterways throughout the City. To maximise and deliver the benefits of the waterways as an infrastructure asset required considerable investment and funding for officer post(s) to deliver.
5. The Waterways Coordinator's direct experience as someone who lives on a boat had been both enlightening and invaluable, not least in improving the relationship between the Council and the City's boating community. This had contributed to a better understanding of the facilities, or lack of them, for boat owners, particularly but not exclusively, for those who live aboard. Some of these issues had been picked up in the new Local Plan. There was a hope that there would be some vibrant cultural activity on the waterways in 2021, once the impact of Covid-19 had lessened. It was clear that the waterways were well used as a health and wellbeing resource. In relation to the recommendation concerning initiatives to combat the climate and ecological crisis, a bid had gone to the Green Recovery Challenge Fund.
6. In response to the presentation the Scrutiny Committee focused its discussion on the following, making makes 8 recommendations:
 - Continuing the successful work undertaken thus far
 - Provision of infrastructure, particularly for live-aboards
 - Wider issues

Continuing Success

7. Endorsement of the success of the Waterways Coordinator in developing working relationships across the broad range of stakeholders, including those with whom the Council had previously had poor relations, was highlighted from all parties at the meeting: the Cabinet portfolio holder, Scrutiny members, the post-holder's

line manager, and the incoming Chair of the Oxford City Canal Partnership. The original report to Scrutiny references the ‘resource it provides to create and to maintain strong relationships with external partners and to assist in coordinating activity’ and ‘due to the cross-cutting nature of the work, the waterways officer post also assists in coordinating activity within the council, working across team boundaries’.

8. The central role of the role of the Waterways Coordinator in developing and maintaining the relationships with multiple stakeholders – internal and external – through which to make progress on ensuring the multiple benefits of the waterways are realised is clear. It was, however, reported to the Committee that owing to the budget pressures faced by the Council in light of Covid-19, the current intention was not to recruit a replacement for the post and for it to expire, as planned, in September 2021.
9. The Committee is concerned at this news, and the prospect that the relationships built and successes thus far may slow or even reverse without continued resource by the Council. However, it also recognises the sharp financial reality the Council faces and makes a number of recommendations as to how the successes to date may be continued.
10. Given that Oxford’s waterways form part of a wider network, which extends beyond the Council’s boundaries, coordination between neighbouring councils is an important factor in maximising the potential benefit. The suggestion of the Scrutiny Committee is that before letting the role lapse completely, the Council investigate the possibility of sharing the post with neighbouring councils. This would not only have the benefit of creating closer coordination between councils, but would also spread the cost across participating councils.

Recommendation 1: That the Council investigates the appetite amongst neighbouring authorities for establishing a shared Waterways Coordinator post

11. As part of his address to the Committee, a challenge was levied to the Council by Ian Green along similar lines. In the absence of dedicated resource, the challenge of developing in partnership plans to maximise the benefit of the waterways is unlikely to be overcome. It was the suggestion that an important part of this would be strategic considerations of waterways development, and that in order to progress this a forum, led by the Council, should be established to ensure coordination of activity and policy between partners. The Committee is in agreement that without leadership by the Council, continued progress regarding the waterways is unlikely, and it supports the idea of administering a forum through which to coordinate activity as a relatively low-cost, high-return means of coordinating strategic waterways activity.

Recommendation 2: That the Council establishes and administers a forum of key waterways stakeholders to coordinate strategic policy and activity.

Provision of Infrastructure

12. The Committee was generally supportive of the concept of boats being used as homes in the context of the high cost of accommodation within the city, and in particular welcomed the news that the development at Redbridge Paddocks

includes plans for moorings. However, at present, some basic infrastructure for live-aboards moored in Oxford is absent; the nearest place to empty rubbish, sewerage and take on fresh water is in Abingdon, which is a journey of approximately two and half hours each way and, for an average boat, needs to be undertaken every one to two months. Clearly, for the existing live-aboards in Oxford this is sub-optimal, but as more moorings are created the need for local water, sewerage and rubbish-disposal increases. The Committee is aware that providing infrastructure is not cost-free, but members suggested that if boats are truly to be considered homes, an equivalence of spending between those residents living on boats and those on land is justified, and that the current level of infrastructure is suggestive that the boat-dwellers may at present be under-served. The Committee wonders whether CIL funding for housing developments may be harnessed to put in such infrastructure.

13. The Committee is open-minded about where such infrastructure should be situated, but on the face of it the development at Redbridge Paddocks does appear to provide a good opportunity.

Recommendation 3: That the Council ensures the provision of facilities for boats to dispose of waste, empty sewer tanks and take on fresh water at Redbridge Paddocks or an alternative venue locally.

14. The development of moorings raises the question of who should be responsible for their ongoing management. The Committee recognises that relationships between boat-dwellers and the Council are much improved compared to previously, but it is concerned that Council management of new moorings may possibly be a cause of conflict. Instead, community-ownership or community-management models, whereby boat-owners themselves are responsible for the infrastructure is thought to be an opportunity for reduced conflict and community-empowerment. The Committee is keen that the appetite for and practicability of such models be explored with relevant stakeholders when decisions over management and ownership over waterways moorings are considered.

Recommendation 4: That the Council explores the option of community ownership for moorings when ownership and management arrangements are decided.

15. One contentious issue between residents near moorings and the residents of those moorings themselves concerns emissions. Boats are not included within the Clean Air Act, meaning they are able to emit gasses which would be deemed too damaging to allow a household to emit. It is clearly in the interests of boat-dwellers, their land-living neighbours and the Council to see an improvement in air quality, and whilst the provision of electric charging points will not automatically mean boat-dwellers will switch to cleaner technology, an absence of charging points provides no incentive at all to switch. Consequently, the Committee encourages the Council to consider where it may install electric charging points near high-risk areas, and where it may work with partners to encourage them to do likewise.

Recommendation 5: That the Council incorporates the provision of electric charging points for boats into its strategic development plans for the waterways, particularly in those areas where moorings are in close proximity to housing and schools.

16. Whilst the Committee focused discussion on a number of key priorities, it also recognised that there is a huge amount of policy to unpack to understand the implications and responsibilities of a policy position that welcomes and encourages the use of boats as homes within the city. In the report presented to the Committee it was stated that the most appropriate vehicle to do this would be through the Council's forthcoming refresh of its Housing and Homelessness Strategy. The Committee is keen that this is done.

Recommendation 6: That the Council includes within its refreshed Housing and Homelessness Strategy a section to consider the implications and responsibilities arising from endorsing the use of boats as homes in Oxford.

Wider Issues

17. One general comment made was that the overall balance of plans for the waterways tended to focus on the city centre northwards. Whilst not wishing to deprioritise any of the proposals made for those areas, it was suggested that projects to support and enhance the waterways in the east and south of the city be developed.

Recommendation 7: That the Council proactively seeks to increase the number of projects in waterways to the east and south of the city.

18. The Committee discussed the importance of the cross-party motion on water quality agreed at Council on 05 October. Whilst it is recognised that the responsibilities arising from according the Thames bathing status fall almost exclusively with Thames Water, who were not participants in developing the Waterways Vision in 2019, non-polluted water is an important part of increasing the amenity of the river. As such, the Committee recommends that the vision be included to make reference to the Council's agreed wish to improve the quality of water in the Thames.

Recommendation 8: That the Council refreshes the Waterways Vision document to reference the Council's motion on bathing water quality.

Further Consideration

19. It is not expected that Scrutiny will revisit this topic in the current civic year. Its consideration in the future will likely be dependent on the way in which the Council decides to manage the issues that arise from the waterways.

Report author	Tom Hudson
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk

Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 03/11/2020 concerning the Waterways report

Response provided by Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford, Councillor Louise Upton

23

Recommendation	Agree?	Comment
1) That the Council investigates the appetite amongst neighbouring authorities for establishing a shared Waterways Coordinator post	Agree	The work programme with the Waterways Officer will be agreed to include contacting neighbouring authorities with a proposal outline to gauge the level of support.
2) That the Council establishes and administers a forum of key waterways stakeholders to coordinate strategic policy and activity.	Partially Agree	There are a range of forums in existence, working with key partners we will review the need for any new or additional meeting with stakeholders. This will align with the work in recommendation 1.
3) That the Council ensures the provision of facilities for boats to dispose of waste, empty sewer tanks and take on fresh water at Redbridge Paddocks or an alternative venue locally.	Agree	The Council has noted the lack of facilities within the City. Where feasible, the Council will encourage the provision of new facilities through instructing our planning officers, who have the key relationship with developers, to actively explore providing these amenities.
4) That the Council explores the option of community ownership for moorings when ownership and management arrangements are decided.	Agree	This will be explored where feasible, through research into models adopted elsewhere in the UK.
5) That the Council incorporates the provision of electric charging points for boats into its strategic development plans for the waterways, particularly in those areas where moorings are in close proximity to housing and schools.	Agree	Where feasible this will be explored, an opportunity may exist if there is scope to develop the community ownership model of mooring. It may require capital expenditure and needs detailed feasibility to understand if the desired outcome is possible at appropriate locations.

<p>6) That the Council includes within its refreshed Housing and Homelessness Strategy a section to consider the implications and responsibilities arising from endorsing the use of boats as homes in Oxford.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Council recognises that boats provide one of the few affordable housing options in the city. We will explore the implications in the next housing strategy refresh.</p>
<p>7) That the Council proactively seeks to increase the number of projects in waterways to the east and south of the city.</p>	<p>Disagree</p>	<p>At present the focus is on key waterways, the Thames/Isis and Oxford Canal. Other waterways within the city can be examined to understand the needs in those areas. However, with the limited resource currently available, priority is centred on the key waterways links. In due course this will be revisited.</p>
<p>8) That the Council refreshes the Waterways Vision document to reference the Council's motion on bathing water quality.</p>	<p>Agree</p>	<p>Reference can be made to this in the Waterways Vision document, while it must also be recognised that the key players on water quality are Thames Water and the Environment Agency.</p>