

# Supplement for

# Cabinet

On **Wednesday 16 June 2021** At **6.00 pm**

## Reports from Scrutiny

### Contents

<b>7. Scrutiny Committee Reports</b>	<b>3 - 14</b>
Scrutiny Committee had met on 08 June and submitted recommendations to Cabinet in relation to the Safeguarding Report and the County-wide Transformation of Homelessness and Rough Sleeping report.	

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

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 16 June 2021  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2020/21

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2020/21
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Healthier, Safer Oxford
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Supporting Flourishing Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 08 June 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Council Safeguarding Report 2020/21.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Healthier, Safer Oxford for presenting the report, Dani Granito, Policy and Partnerships Manager, Corporate Policy, for authoring the report and answering questions and Laura Jones also for supporting the meeting.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer Healthy Oxford, introduced the report. As a Council which, through its many and various ways of working, comes into contact with a significant number of vulnerable people, it has a statutory duty to keep them as safe as possible. In order to do that, its safeguarding processes are reviewed annually and that audit is made public. All Councillors will have the opportunity to undertake safeguarding training which makes clear the responsibility of everyone to be an active participant in safeguarding our community and which draws attention to the “My Concern” reporting mechanism. The latest audit draws attention to the particular safeguarding issues and challenges resulting from the pandemic. Safeguarding was a matter in which the Council worked in close partnership with other agencies, notably the County Council, the Police and Health Service, all of which are represented on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB). The safeguarding duty should extend beyond just ensuring the basic welfare of our citizens and from beyond their surviving to their thriving.
4. Dani Granito, Policy & Partnerships Team Manager, noted that overall responsibility for safeguarding in OCC now lay with the Head of Corporate Strategy. The report drew attention to the safeguarding work delivered via the 5 locality hubs during the pandemic. This included, for example, the provision of 210 laptops to pupils who could not otherwise access remote learning. A continuing national and local concern was that of neglect; the majority of local children on a child protection plan were experiencing neglect in some form. A considerable effort (via external peer review among other things) was being made to see how best to support those young people and prevent them experiencing neglect. All members of the partnership were now required to produce a Neglect Action Plan and a three monthly account of progress with it.
5. The OSCB and OSAB required the Council to conduct an annual safeguarding assessment. It was pleasing to note that the most recent assessment had, for the 4<sup>th</sup> consecutive year, concluded that the Council demonstrated best practice in all 5 subject areas.
6. Issues raised by the Committee in response to the report and presentation included more information about the Jacob serious case review and the outcomes of the report on the number of deaths of homeless people in temporary accommodation in Oxford, the support for the voluntary sector in safeguarding and member training.
7. The Committee makes two recommendations relating to i) Oxford’s status as a City of Sanctuary, and ii) the contextualisation of data in its public report.

## City of Sanctuary

8. The Committee noted a comment made in s. 6.3 of the Council’s safeguarding policy, which says that the Council has a duty ‘to report any suspected victims of exploitation (slavery or human trafficking) to the Secretary of State’.

9. The Committee recognises that the primary purpose of this duty is a positive one, which contributes towards reducing slavery and human trafficking. It also recognises that it is under an obligation to do so. However, whilst ostensibly any such reporting should be of benefit to a relevant individual the Committee is concerned that such information sharing could be used for the purposes of immigration enforcement, which would run counter to the City's commitment to being a City of Sanctuary. The Committee wishes to support the aim of this duty, but asks that the Council is mindful of the potential that the information shared to be used in ways which are less clearly supportive of victims, such as immigration enforcement. It recommends that the Council is cognisant of this risk and seeks to minimise it in the way that it fulfils its duties around slavery and human trafficking.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council ensures that the information it shares with the Secretary of State in relation to slavery and human trafficking is consistent with the City's status as a City of Sanctuary and is not used for immigration enforcement.***

### **Data Contextualisation**

10. The Committee is welcoming of the results of the safeguarding assessment. A return of a full complement of green ratings provides a high-level endorsement of the way the Council approaches and implements its safeguarding duties. The safeguarding report published, however, is a public document which delves into greater depth to give a fuller picture of what, specifically, the Council has been doing to ensure the safety of the vulnerable children and adults it engages with.
11. In the main, reports of activity are clear and the outcome is understood. For example, 'Oxford City Council trained 100% of all locality HUB staff within the first 4 weeks of the first lock down' on safeguarding. However, in the section entitled 'Outcomes for, and experiences of, people who use statutory services' the Committee suggests that the same level of clarity and precision is not present. In paragraph 41 of the report, for example, the following positive outcomes are stated: '27 are now engaging with services within the OMHP, 13 of these tenants avoided Mental Health Act assessment/hospital admission/section, and 5 tenants avoiding re admissions to hospital.' Whilst these are clearly positive outcomes and are celebrated, the Committee indicated that if greater context were provided a greater understanding of the effectiveness of the Council could be gleaned, rather than simply the volume of positive outcomes. Specifically, it would be helpful to know how many people the Council sought to work with through mental health worker support, and the number who engaged with mental health workers but still experienced negative outcomes.
12. A similar pattern is repeated throughout the section. From discussion with officers it is understood that a lot of the data on effectiveness is monitored. The Committee recommends that the publicly available version of this report is amended to provide the data required to contextualise the positive outcomes experienced by those engaging with its services. This will not only support the Council's transparency, but given its success around safeguarding will provide additional proof of the effectiveness of its work.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council amends for its publicly available version of the Annual Safeguarding Report the section on outcomes for those who use statutory services to provide the contextual data needed to judge the effectiveness of these service interventions rather than the quantity of positive outcomes.***

### **Further Consideration**

13. The Committee expressed an interest in how the Council's safeguarding activity would interact with the responses to the recommendations of the Domestic Abuse Review Group and looks forward to receiving those from Cabinet in due course. However, no further direct consideration of safeguarding is anticipated until the 2021/22 report is considered by Cabinet.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 08/06/2021 concerning the Council Safeguarding Report 2020/21**

**Response provided by Cabinet Member for a Healthier, Safer Oxford, Louise Upton**

7

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<p><b>1) That the Council ensures that the information it shares with the Secretary of State in relation to slavery and human trafficking is consistent with the City's status as a City of Sanctuary and is not used for immigration enforcement.</b></p>	<p>Partially agreed</p>	<p>Oxford City Council have said we are a <u>city of sanctuary</u> and will not link with the Government's hostile environment programme – and have identified a number of services – eg. <u>homelessness</u>, where we don't report details through to the Immigration service.</p> <p>This issue has been looked into in depth and there are few instances where this could happen possibly; only where the NRM process has been concluded and the negative suggested no evidence of modern slavery it could possibly lead on to other processes. However, no evidence has been found to support this occurring.</p> <p>It should be stressed, however, that as part of its aims around being a City of Sanctuary Oxford City Council should of course be sharing information in cases of modern day slavery and where we are working to safeguard and prevent crime.</p>
<p><b>2) That the Council amends for its publicly available version of the Annual Safeguarding Report the section on outcomes for those who use statutory services to provide the contextual data needed to judge the effectiveness of these service interventions rather than the quantity of positive outcomes.</b></p>	<p>Agreed</p>	<p><i>We can provide further information to balance a view with regard to the overall data and outcomes. This must however be in context around the group of people the project aims to support.</i></p>



**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 16 June 2021  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** County-wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Cabinet report on the County-wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Supporting Flourishing Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy 2018 - 2021
<b>Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.</b>	

<b>Appendices</b>
None

### **Introduction and overview**

1. At its meeting on 08 June 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet on the County-wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless.
2. The Committee would like to thank Nerys Parry for presenting and authoring the report and for answering questions.

## **Summary and recommendation**

3. Nerys Parry, Housing Strategy and Needs Manager, introduced the report which explained significant changes to the way in which services would be delivered. The pandemic had necessitated some change to service delivery already and, notably, increased the level of partnership working. A focus on a 'housing led' approach to work was proposed. There was recognition that there should be an objective of seeking permanent, stable, homes sooner rather than later for homeless people when trying to secure them accommodation; the model of hostels which had been in place for many years should be seen as a second best option.
4. Central to the proposals was the introduction of a new mechanism for commissioning services when the current 'pooled budget' arrangements come to an end. Under the new arrangements, services would be jointly commissioned between the County and City Councils using a revised pooled budget funded by Local Authority and Health partners with much more of a partnership approach than hitherto. The change was as much to do with how services were commissioned as to what was commissioned. The service is currently dependent to a significant degree on Government funding, the future of which was not guaranteed and so exposes the services to some risk. The new commissioning arrangements will be subject to value for money criteria among others. A continuing priority was on steps to prevent homelessness in the first place.
5. In response to the presentation the Committee explored issues around homelessness prevention in light of the challenge of the recent end to the eviction ban. The other key area of discussion was over issues pertaining to the new commissioning arrangements.
6. In total, the Committee makes four recommendations.

## **Homelessness Prevention**

7. The Committee is in agreement with the advice it was given, that in order to balance the high level of input to support homeless individuals, preventing homelessness above and beyond the level of statutory duties in the first place is a vital component. Without it the system could become swamped.
8. The Committee also recognises that over the Covid period many people have seen reductions to their income – be it through furlough, reduced hours and job losses or an inability for small businesses to trade. For many in private rented accommodation this has caused difficulties in making rent payments, with an estimated 840,000 households in the private rented sector nationwide falling into arrears. In Oxford, with its high housing costs and high proportion of private renters this is likely to be a particularly acute issue, one which the end to the eviction ban could bring to a head. Putting to one side the huge personal costs that evictions would bring, this represents a clear challenge to the wider homelessness reduction strategy being embarked on.
9. Owing to this, the Committee hopes that the Council can learn from good practice elsewhere in terms of tenancy sustainment. Derby City Council's 'Call B4 You Serve' scheme is one such scheme which has been identified as an example of best practice by the Local Government Association. The service is a free,

specialist and impartial service for private rented sector landlords and is designed to help them avoid serving an eviction notice by dealing with tenancy issues early.

10. The Committee recognises that it is not always practical or effective to replicate exactly schemes from elsewhere, even where they are good practice. However, it hopes that the Council can take ideas from this scheme to strengthen tenancies locally and help to undergird the wider homelessness prevention strategy.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council reviews Derby City Council's 'Call B4 You Serve' scheme to identify elements that might be enacted locally to maintain tenancies within the private rented sector***

### **Commissioning Arrangements**

11. The Cabinet report on this topic devotes a significant amount of time talking about commissioning and how services will be jointly-commissioned through an alliance model. The governance structure of this model is set out in Appendix 3 of the Cabinet report. One issue raised by the Committee was a lack of clarity over how directly political voices would be heard and reflected within the structure. A joint alliance will throw up a wide spectrum of issues and questions, some of which would be better suited to officer responsibility, and some better managed at a political level. In particular, the Committee is keen to see that the process of how services are procured one in which elected members have significant input.

12. The Committee recognises that this issue of procurement is particularly complex. Not only is the Council having to contend with the twin aims of maximising quality and ensuring value for money, but it seeks to do so in an innovative, cross-Council environment all whilst simultaneously also building much greater flexibility into the contracts it funds. So whilst it believes that those directly accountable to local tax payers should have a significant say in the ultimate outcome, the Committee is also keen that those decision makers should have access to the very best possible advice.

13. The Committee applauds the ambition shown in trying to address homelessness issues, but recognises that there are risks commensurate with the level of ambition. Poorly delivered procurement could prove slow, lacking in agility, expensive and or delivering poor quality, all issues which would put a stress on the cross-working and cooperation the county-wide approach relies on. Given that there is at present discussion within the public sector over the relative merits of tendering a service and choosing the partner at the end vs earlier identification of delivery partners and co-development of services with them the value of expert advice to match best practice with Oxfordshire's complex circumstances is clear.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council ensures that the governance of the joint commissioning structure includes political and not just officer representation.***

***Recommendation 3: That the Council is assured that it and the other partner Councils are being provided the best professional advice regarding the most suitable approach to procurement of its services.***

14. As noted above, a key attribute highlighted to the Committee for commissioned services under the new arrangements is flexibility and the ability to adapt throughout the course of a contract. The pandemic illustrated the importance of this particularly well, and the Committee recognises how well both partners have adapted their work in relation to the St Mungos contract.
15. Often, as with Floyds Row for example, change and adaptation to new circumstances will require physical work to make suitable existing infrastructure for new purposes or new ways of working. The Committee suggests that the naturally close relationship the Council has with Oxford Direct Services as its sole shareholder would place it well to undertake such work, particularly where the situation is complex and a number of unknowns exist at the start of the project, for instance where year-to-year government grant funding is involved. Given that the smoothness of project delivery has very significant real-world consequences on the stability of rough sleepers in need of services, the ability to manage uncertainty and challenges better is particularly valuable and is perhaps a less heralded aspect of the Council's Oxford Model.
16. Additionally, the Committee recognises that the Oxford Model approach has aspects which are not limited to its companies, pertinently here the recognition that outsourcing is not necessarily money-saving and that investment in staff can be seen in higher levels of service. The Committee is aware that there are parts of the Council, such as the Housing Advice Service, which have significant areas of natural cross-over with the proposed services being commissioned, most notably the Navigator service. It encourages the Council to be alive to the possibilities of in-housing suitable services.
17. As referenced above, the Committee recognises that in a joint-commissioning arrangement such as is proposed the Council is not solely responsible for making such decisions and must work within the wider alliance model. However, it hopes that the Council will consistently draw attention to the added value that the Council's own companies can provide and that it maximises the opportunities available for them to tender for work, and that it also does not overlook the benefits in-housed services might bring.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council works with joint commissioning partners to promote the added value the Council's companies can bring, to maximise opportunities for them to demonstrate that value, and to be alive to the benefits of directly delivered services by Council staff.***

**Further Consideration**

18. The Committee anticipates that the Housing and Homelessness Panel will address multiple aspects of this broad-ranging report throughout the course of the civic year.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 08/06/2021 concerning the County-wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping and Single Homeless.

A verbal response will be provided by Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless, Diko Blackings

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>1) That the Council reviews Derby City Council's 'Call B4 You Serve' scheme to identify elements that might be enacted locally to maintain tenancies within the private rented sector</b>		
<b>2) That the Council ensures that the governance of the joint commissioning structure includes political and not just officer representation.</b>		
<b>3) That the Council is assured that it and the other partner Councils are being provided the best professional advice regarding the most suitable approach to procurement of its services.</b>		
<b>4) That the Council works with joint commissioning partners to promote the added value the Council's companies can bring, to maximise opportunities for them to demonstrate that value, and to be alive to the benefits of directly delivered services by Council staff.</b>		