

# Supplement for

# Scrutiny Committee

On **Tuesday 2 November 2021** At **6.00 pm**

## Agenda Item 8 - Reports for Approval

### Contents

<b>8. Reports for approval</b>	<b>3 - 14</b>
The Committee is asked to approve reports and recommendations on the following for subsequent submission to Cabinet:	
1. Housing & Homelessness Panel report on Housing & Carbon Reduction	
2. Report on Air Quality further to discussion at the previous meeting.	

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:** 10 November 2021  
**Report of:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Title of Report:** Housing and Carbon Reduction

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned report on Housing and Carbon Reduction
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Linda Smith, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Diko Blackings, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	More Affordable Housing; Zero Carbon Oxford
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy
<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 06 October 2021, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered a report it had commissioned concerning Housing and Carbon Reduction.
2. The Panel would like to thank Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager, for authoring the report and attending the Panel meeting to present it and respond to questions.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Malcolm Peek, Property Services Manager, presented a Panel-requested report on Housing and the Low Carbon Agenda.
4. The Council had a target of ensuring that 95% of its homes were rated no lower than a C on EPC ratings by 2030. Some government funding was being used to support this, with Local Authority Delivery and Social Housing Decarbonisation Funds being accessed as available. The bulk of the work was progressing, however, without government funding and a budget of £7m was available to 2030 to cover the work required to bring approximately 2500 Council-owned homes up to a C rating. Current focus was on procuring external expert advice on the works required, which would then be profiled into a programme. Surveys were anticipated to be completed by March 2022. Typical solutions would include fabric-first solutions such as internal and external insulation, draft-proofing, but also possibly other solutions such as solar and installation of heat pumps.
5. The Panel's key area of discussion in response was over tenant engagement with the process, which is detailed further below. Beyond this, it also challenged the degree of disruption that the works would cause tenants, and welcomed reports that there would be very little need to decant tenants. Government funding was also discussed further, and the Panel agrees with the proposed approach and its rationale, to seek government funding wherever possible, but to recognise that government funding is often time or technology specific. As such, it is unlikely that the Council's plans and government funding will align closely enough to rely on, and the Council should therefore prioritise delivering the improvements, doing so to its own programme and willing to fund it, and take any cross-overs as serendipitous.
6. As alluded to above, the Panel wishes to make two recommendations regarding Council engagement with tenants over the improvements to the energy efficiency of their homes.

## Tenant Engagement

7. The retrofitting of around 2500 properties is large undertaking, which has the potential to change the way that a significant number of tenants use and enjoy their homes. The scale of the project and the importance to tenants of a pleasant home environment means that, to the Panel's view, strong tenant engagement throughout is particularly important. In the report that the Panel received there was an appendix detailing the Council's campaign plan, which consists of a letter-writing exercise with in-person follow-ups for non-responders over a course of three months with a view to securing details of those interested in having their homes upgraded. The Panel agrees with the need for this, but suggests there is opportunity for greater tenant empowerment and self-determination if more collaborative working is established at the outset.
8. The Panel was informed that it is the Council's policy to pursue a fabric first approach, seeking to make homes more efficient before changing the way homes are heated. Switching from gas to electric would, unless other measures were also taken, such as solar, increase energy costs for heating. As such, it is likely that there will be a lot of replacements to doors and windows. Similarly, if

internal wall insulation is required, this will require redecoration. Whilst for the Council the outcome of the retrofitting is the primary concern, for tenants the finishings might be of greater importance, and the Panel is keen that the ability to shape this is improved by involvement at an early stage.

9. Not all changes will be made to individual homes; blocks of flats are likely to have at least some work undertaken on a block level. The Panel would wish to see tenant representatives consulted to ensure these works also progress with tenant support. Establishing such consultee networks is not quickly done, which is a further reason for early involvement.
10. There is, however, a more fundamental point to be made, which is that spending from the HRA is spending of tenant's rent monies. Collaborating on finishings and what is to be delivered is worthwhile, but it remains fairly limited in terms of autonomy. The ability to choose *who* will undertake work is also an important function of self-determination and the Panel is keen this is promoted as far as possible. This is already work done by the Tenant Involvement Team, who get informed tenant input into responding to tenders, so it is felt that doing so in this instance would be fairly straightforward.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council works with the Tenant Involvement Team to ensure tenant engagement is sought and incorporated into the Council's work plans for improving the energy efficiency of its housing stock at the earliest stage. Areas of engagement to include both work with individual households and multi-household representatives for wider-ranging issues**

11. Related to the point above is another, more specific one. In its discussion the Panel noted that individuals with disabilities or who have mental health difficulties face greater risks when changes are made to the ways in which their homes are lived in. Specific consideration of their situation and particular needs is necessary in order to avoid disproportionate negative consequences arising from poor choices. For instance, someone who is at home almost all the time may benefit from a heating system designed to be always on, such as a heat pump and solar. Someone who also medically requires that their household is kept at a high temperature may find a heat pump not so useful a solution if it has insufficient heat generation during a cold snap. Loss of room space from internal insulation could be particularly problematic for people who are mobility-impaired. In each situation, what might be a standard (and reasonable) response for a person without disability or mental health problem could lead to significant detriment, be it financially, health-wise, or in terms of the functionality of their home. The Panel is concerned that without specific training or other provision to support these people they risk getting a substandard service in designing the upgrade of their new home, or they may choose not to engage at all. As such, the Panel wishes to underline the importance of providing dedicated provision for people in this situation to ensure they get informed advice on the best changes to make to their homes.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council makes specific provision to support those with disabilities or mental health problems to engage in discussions about the most appropriate changes to their homes.**

**Further Consideration**

12. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is unlikely to consider this item directly again during the civic year. Scrutiny, however, will continue to focus on issues of sustainability in the stock being developed through the Companies Scrutiny Panel.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 06/10/2021 concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned report on Housing and Carbon Reduction**

**Provided by the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless, Councillor Diko Blackings**

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Agree?</i></b>	<b><i>Comment</i></b>
<p><b>1) That the Council works with the Tenant Involvement Team to ensure tenant engagement is sought and incorporated into the Council's work plans for improving the energy efficiency of its housing stock at the earliest stage. Areas of engagement to include both work with individual households and multi-household representatives for wider-ranging issues</b></p>		
<p><b>2) That the Council makes specific provision to support those with disabilities or mental health problems to engage in discussions about the most appropriate changes to their homes.</b></p>		

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Date of Cabinet Meeting:

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 10 November 2021  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Tom Hayes, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Pursue a zero carbon Oxford
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<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 October 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report based on the Council's Annual Air Quality Status Report for 2020.
2. The Committee would like to thank Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer, for authoring and presenting the report, particularly in light of Councillor Hayes' inability to attend the meeting owing to illness.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Pedro Abreu, Air Quality Officer, introduced the annual report, which fulfilled a statutory duty and provided an overview of all monitoring data for the year and an update in relation to the air quality actions set out in the Council's Air Quality Action Plan 2021-2025.
4. The previous year had been atypical given the consequences of Covid and significantly reduced traffic volumes. As a result of this, for the first time since air quality monitoring started in Oxford, there were significant reductions in air pollution levels and the city had been compliant with all short and long term UK air quality objectives. The highest annual mean however continued to be in St Clements.
5. The Committee devoted significant discussion to i) understanding air quality impacts arising from Low Traffic Neighbourhood schemes (LTNs) ii) ways to work with other stakeholders to improve air quality, and iii) suggested functionality for the upcoming air quality website. On these issues it makes a total of five recommendations. Further, the Committee discussed its concern over the use of wood burning stoves. Members were assured that this would be addressed by information programmes to draw attention to the impact of their use and advice about best practice in relation to their use.

## Air Quality and Low Traffic Neighbourhoods

6. An issue of particular interest for the Committee is that of LTNs, and specifically whether traffic (and therefore vehicle emissions) which can no longer travel through the LTNs is being funnelled to nearby streets instead, a displacement effect. Committee members highlighted particular concern for Hollow Way as potentially experiencing this effect.
7. The Committee recognises that the current LTN in Headington is a trial. It notes that projected falls in car journeys may not happen immediately, meaning it is important that the effects are given time to show. Equally, however, it is also important that LTNs do not merely shift the negative externalities of traffic, such as poorer air quality, from one area to another. Indeed, it is quite possible that a partial reduction in traffic and a partial displacement effect could co-exist, and not inconceivable that the negatives of displacement could outweigh the benefits of a reduction in overall traffic. This situation would concentrate the burdens some households more heavily than others, oftentimes on the less well off, leading to their being asked to bear unacceptable proportions of the burdens arising from LTNs. The Committee considers this an important consideration within the overall conversation about the future of LTNs, and requests that the Council review the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to enable monitoring of areas where there is the potential of a displacement effect from LTNs. Given the public interest in this issue, the Committee suggests that all information be made publicly available to inform the discourse on the issue.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council reviews the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to support the monitoring of roads where there is the possibility of displacement traffic generated by LTNs,***

***particularly around Hollow Way and the junction with Crescent Road, that the Council makes publicly available the findings as soon as possible if and when the Cowley, Headington and East Oxford LTNs are concluded, and that the information is also passed on to County Council colleagues.***

8. Getting air quality data for streets around LTNs is necessary in identifying whether a displacement effect is occurring, but it is not sufficient. Without other sources of data it is not possible to tell whether a deterioration in air quality in streets in the vicinity of an LTN can be attributed to displacement traffic from the LTN, or from an overall growth in traffic. Members of the Committee were unsure as to whether traffic monitoring of this sort was being undertaken by the County Council in its role as the Highways authority. Given how polarising a topic LTNs are proving to be, it is the Committee's view that it is imperative that decisions made around their continuation should be evidence-led. Air quality impacts for nearby streets are an important issue within that wider conversation and the Committee seeks that the Council works with colleagues at the County Council to ensure that decisions made around it are informed by data.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council seeks to work with the County Council to ensure that sufficient concurrent data is collected and shared to enable contextualised analysis of the impacts of LTNs, with particular regard to identifying whether a displacement effect is evident.***

### **Working with Other Stakeholders**

9. The Committee recognises that whilst it has a goal and a plan to reduce air pollution to below government limits, the overwhelming majority of emissions are produced outside the direct influence of the Council. As such, partnership working with other local stakeholders is vital. There are a number of institutions based locally providing a high number of jobs, and therefore a commensurate contribution to commuter travel – the universities, the hospitals, the County Council, Unipart and the Mini factory, for example. Working to ensure that such key institutions are working in tandem with the Council's own targets and plans over air quality would provide an outsized impact. The Committee suggests the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership as the easiest means to engage such institutions, but its primary concern is that the Council is proactive in engaging and working with partners in the most effective way to ensure their strategic plans are in line with the Council's own air quality targets and aspirations.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council works with the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership to engage major local stakeholders, including the universities, in conversations with the Council about how they can incorporate air-quality positive measures into their strategic plans.***

10. Whilst strategic plans and high-level activity to curb air pollution are undoubtedly important, so too is behavioural change at a local community and individual level. The Committee wishes the Council's efforts to promote this to be as effective as possible, with members keen to be able to share the educational material

produced by the Air Quality team throughout their own community networks. It is requested, therefore, that these graphics are made available to all councillors as they are produced with the encouragement that they be shared further.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council makes available to all councillors all educational graphics developed by the Air Quality team for further sharing with community organisations.***

### **Website Functionality**

11. The Committee approves of proposals to launch a new community air quality website to provide greater transparency over air quality throughout the city. One function felt to be of particular benefit is to allow members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts. Given that traffic volume is not the sole determinant of air pollution on a given day, it is not necessarily easy to tell when it has reached a level where behaviour may need to be adjusted for health reasons. This is particularly important for those with particular vulnerability to air pollution, such as those with breathing problems, the elderly and the young. Real time alerts would provide objective data to enable such people to make choices beneficial to their health. Discussions at the meeting indicated that there were not technical barriers to adding this function to the website, in which case the Committee recommends that it is.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council builds a function into the new community Air Quality website to enable members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts***

### **Further Consideration**

12. The Committee does not anticipate revisiting this topic in the current civic year.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 05/10/2021 concerning the Annual Air Quality Status Report (2020)**

**Response provided by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Green Transport and Zero Carbon Oxford, Councillor Tom Hayes**

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<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Agree?</i></b>	<b><i>Comment</i></b>
<b>1) That the Council reviews the location of its air quality monitoring equipment to support the monitoring of roads where there is the possibility of displacement traffic generated by LTNs, particularly around Hollow Way and the junction with Crescent Road, that the Council makes publicly available the findings as soon as possible if and when the Cowley, Headington and East Oxford LTNs are concluded, and that the information is also passed on to County Council colleagues.</b>		
<b>2) That the Council seeks to work with the County Council to ensure that sufficient concurrent data is collected and shared to enable contextualised analysis of the impacts of LTNs, with particular regard to identifying whether a displacement effect is evident.</b>		
<b>3) That the Council works with the Oxfordshire Strategic Partnership to engage major local stakeholders, including the universities, in conversations with the Council about how they can incorporate air-quality positive measures into their strategic plans.</b>		

<b>4) That the Council makes available to all councillors all educational graphics developed by the Air Quality team for further sharing with community organisations.</b>		
<b>5) That the Council builds a function into the new community Air Quality website to enable members of the public to subscribe to real time air quality alerts</b>		