

# Supplement for

# Cabinet

On **Wednesday 13 April 2022** At **6.00 pm**

## Agenda Item 7 - Scrutiny Reports

### Contents

7. **Scrutiny reports**

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Scrutiny Committee met on 12 April 2022. The following reports are expected and will be published as a supplement, together with any other recommendations to Cabinet from that meeting:

- Procurement Update
- Oxfordshire 2050 Plan
- DSS Discrimination Motion Update
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment (NB No Cabinet response is expected to this item until the first Cabinet meeting after the election)

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:** 13 April 2022  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Procurement Strategy

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Scrutiny-requested update on changes to the Procurement Strategy.
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Ed Turner, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<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 18 January 2022, the Scrutiny Committee received a presentation on the Council's current Procurement Strategy and its current thinking on potential changes when it is refreshed.
2. The Committee would like to thank Annette Osborne, Procurement Manager, for attending the meeting to make the presentation and to answer questions.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Annette Osborne explained to the Committee that the Council's Procurement Strategy is currently under review, with a view to seeing it refreshed. A number of the amendments under consideration included the embedding of social value within commissioning and procurement decisions; tailoring the national TOMs (themes outcomes and measures) framework for local use, so called OxTOMs; taking greater account of environmental impacts; strengthening GDPR; contract management: and fostering an inclusive economy through Community Wealth Building.
4. Although the entirety of procurement, and how the Council purchases services is a wide topic, the large majority of the discussion focused on understanding and exploring different aspects of social value within procurement and community wealth building. On these topics, which have significant cross-over with one another, the Committee makes seven recommendations which pertain to good practice which can be learnt from elsewhere, broadening the Council's progressive procurement agenda locally, and specific policies.

## Learning from Good Practice

5. The Council is itself a leader in the area of social value in procurement. In a recent benchmarking exercise the against Croydon, Stoke, Southampton and Birmingham councils,<sup>1</sup> Oxford outperformed or equalled these comparators, with 62.5% of its money being spent locally, scoring well above central government's target of 33%. This is not to say, however, that the Council cannot learn from other high-performing councils in this space. It is noted that the Council has previously contacted Preston Council, a particularly high-profile council concerning community wealth building, and has not received responses. Nevertheless, the past is not necessarily a predictor of the future, and the council could well receive helpful input from other pioneering councils also. As such, it is recommended by the Committee that the Council seek the views of these councils for comment as part of their consultation on the new Procurement Strategy.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council contacts pioneering community wealth building councils for comment as part of its consultation on updating its Procurement Strategy.***

6. One particular aspect of Preston's approach which the Committee is keen to highlight is its transparency over how social value weightings in contract tenders are decided prior to the contract being advertised. It is completely right that there should be flexibility within contracts to tailor them to ensure their primary outcomes are delivered. Weightings between price, quality and risk can all be amended between contracts, and so too should social value.
7. What the Committee is keen to see is that this flexibility is maintained, but that the Council is open to its electorate, to potential suppliers, other anchor

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<sup>1</sup> Eleven suitable councils were identified, but not all provided data in a usable format to enable comparison.

institutions in the city, and interested local authorities who may be looking to emulate Oxford over how variations in social value weightings are arrived at and the guiding principles which influence a contract's final social value weighting. Preston Council make this and indicative evaluation matrices available on their website, and the Committee considers that this is good practice which the Council should seek to emulate

***Recommendation 2: That the Council publishes a description of the principles of that determine its social value weightings in contract tenders and indicative evaluation matrices.***

8. The following point is largely the opposite side of the point above. Yes, the Council should have flexibility in its contracts, but at the same time that flexibility ought not to diminish or sacrifice its commitment to achieving social value. It is important that the Council knows that the weightings it uses are sufficient to develop additional social value above what would have accrued if those weightings had not been applied. It is difficult to measure this precisely; it is reasonable to expect that the mere presence of a social value weighting will encourage companies to provide more than they would otherwise. Nevertheless, the Committee feels that monitoring of how often social value weightings change procurement outcomes would be a reasonable proxy and provide a sense of whether the current weightings do make a tangible difference. This is likely to be of wider interest, so it is suggested that the outcome of this monitoring is reported on a regular basis.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council monitors and reports on how often social value weightings change procurement outcomes.***

9. The Committee makes a further recommendation to bolster this aim of extracting as much social value as possible from the contracts which are put out to tender. As referenced above, there are a number of Councils which are forerunners in developing social value, and the Council already performs well within this group in relation to the percentage of its spend being made locally. However, local spend in some ways is simply a prerequisite for leveraging the Council's power to create social good through its spending. The mechanisms for translating that spend into social good need to be refined, and in this aspect the Council is perhaps not as far advanced as some of the other community wealth building councils. The Committee is keen that continued liaison with other community wealth building councils occurs, particularly in relation to these mechanisms: what to include within 'social value', the weightings in different types of contract to social value and other concerns, ensuring sufficient simplicity that target companies, local SMEs, do not find the associated administrative burdens an insurmountable barrier, and contract monitoring which ensures that promised social benefits are delivered but which, again, are not unduly burdensome. Clearly, every community is different, meaning a cut and paste approach will not work. The outsized influence, for example, of the universities in Oxford are very atypical. Nevertheless, adopting approaches from elsewhere which have been successful is likely to be a valuable starting point for refining the Council's own particular requirements.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council liaises with and models its approach and mechanisms to deliver social value in procurement on other pioneer***

***community wealth building councils unless there is a compelling local reason not to do so.***

### **Broadening Local Impact**

10. One of the key steps identified by Preston in their success is identifying and working with other anchor institutions in the local area. This is an area which the Council is already taking a lead on, with procurement officers looking to develop in consultation with other key local stakeholders the OxTOMs framework. The Committee welcomes the work undertaken to date, but does wish to underline its continued importance. A shared approach to social value locally amongst anchor institutions would make it far more resource-effective for local firms to invest time in understanding and developing an offer to meet this single social value framework than a patchwork of differing schemes. The Committee would like to see this work progressed, therefore, as a matter of priority.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council continues, as a matter of priority, to work with anchor institutions locally to develop a shared approach to procurement that enriches the local economy.***

### **Specific Policies**

11. As referenced above, social value is but one of a number of elements weighed when selecting between competitors for a contract. Amidst the financial challenges the Council faces, value for money is clearly a very important consideration. However, the Committee is keen to stress that 'value for money' can be determined in multiple ways and is not necessarily synonymous with 'cheapest'. In October 2019 the Council passed a motion in support of adopting a community wealth building approach to its procurement. Within community wealth building there are multiple additional considerations to simply absolute cost: whole life cost, returns on good value (such as longer durability of items purchased), investment in the local labour force, avoiding surplus leakage, and indirect costs associated with lengthening the supply chain. The Committee seeks assurance that the Council will seek value from its suppliers, as defined by the community wealth building approach to which it is committed, and not just low cost.

***Recommendation 6: That the Council ensures its definition of value for money is consistent with the community wealth building agenda, and specifically that the Council ensures that it is always measuring lowest cost alongside other factors relevant to ethical procurement approaches.***

12. Concern over the ethics of organisations the Council decides to partner with is an issue which has been raised previously by Scrutiny to Cabinet. It is raised here again on two grounds in particular. Firstly, there is a consistency with the thread of social value in procurement that the way the Council spends its money, who it partners with and under what conditions have real-world consequences. As such, the way it chooses to do these things is an expression of the values it holds. The Council will not invest directly in companies which undermine its fundamental values, but at the moment it could trade with them, and be a source of profit to

them. The ethical line between not being willing to support a company through investment and being willing to support it through trade seems very thin. This issue links to the Committee’s second concern, that of public perception. If there were to be a justification for trading with a company but not investing in it, that decision would be a very tight one, and based on a very thorough cost-benefit analysis. It is unlikely, however, that members of the public would be party to such finely calibrated deliberations. If the Council were to choose to partner with an unethical company it would run a reputational risk with the public. The Committee feels this is not a risk worth taking, and that it would be better if the Council provided a wider berth to companies which are particularly ethically controversial.

13. Whilst the Committee stands by this view, it is also pragmatic and understands that the due diligence required to make this wish a reality is significant. Resources devoted to ensuring that the Council does not partner with unethical companies are also resources which cannot be spent in support of our most vulnerable residents. There is a balance to be struck. The Committee is supportive of limiting the scope of any request to larger contracts, where there is more available information on companies and which would reduce the workload. It also does not wish to tie the hands of Council by specifying how any ethical due diligence should be undertaken, trusting that the Council will find a suitable way to make this happen. Ultimately, it is simply keen that the Council begins moving towards taking responsibility for the ethical outcomes of its spending decisions as well as its investment decisions.

***Recommendation 7: That for its larger contracts, the Council institutes an ethical due diligence check to ensure compatibility of commercial partners with the Council’s own standards.***

### Further Consideration

14. The Committee or the Finance and Performance Panel would welcome the opportunity to hear the report on the Procurement Strategy when it comes forward in due course.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 18/01/22 concerning the Scrutiny-commissioned Procurement Update report.**

**Response provided by Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Finance and Asset Management, Councillor Ed Turner**

<b>Recommendation</b>	<b>Agree?</b>	<b>Comment</b>
<b>1) That when the Council contacts pioneering community wealth building councils for comment as part of its consultation on updating its Procurement Strategy.</b>		Procurement will endeavour to contact pioneering community wealth building councils and will review other council procurement strategies when available, however as stated in the Scrutiny meeting, some councils are not forthcoming when asked for information.
<b>2) That the Council publishes a description of the principles of that determine its social value weightings in contract tenders and indicative evaluation matrices.</b>		All requests for quotation and or invitation to tender where the standard template documents are used will include weightings and sub-weightings which must be published and this is captured within the evaluation matrix (example evaluation matrices were sent to you to forward to interested parties).
<b>3) That the Council monitors and reports on how often social value weightings change procurement outcomes.</b>		When procurement undertake the competition it will have access to the evaluation outcomes and would be able to record whether social value changed the outcome, however, the Council operates a devolved procurement (over 500 live contracts) and this is not feasible for all contract awards.
<b>4) That the Council liaises with and models its approach and mechanisms to deliver social value in procurement on other pioneer community wealth building councils unless there is a compelling local reason not to do so.</b>		Procurement are currently working with the community wealth building team in the Council. I would see that any social value in procurement would be modelled on outcomes from those team meetings which include the wider Oxfordshire involvement (County, RAW, Aspire, Oxford University etc.).

<p><b>5) That the Council continues, as a matter of priority, to work with anchor institutions locally to develop a shared approach to procurement that enriches the local economy.</b></p>		<p>As above</p>
<p><b>6) That the Council ensures its definition of value for money is consistent with the community wealth building agenda, and specifically that the Council ensures that it is always measuring lowest cost alongside other factors relevant to ethical procurement approaches.</b></p>		<p>As above procurement are working with the community wealth building team, and we will pursue this as far as possible within the parameters of devolved procurement within the City Council.</p>
<p><b>7) That for its larger contracts, the Council institutes an ethical due diligence check to ensure compatibility of commercial partners with the Council's own standards.</b></p>		<p>There are due diligence checks against which suppliers self-certify, and these have been shared with Scrutiny: this is government standard practice. These checks apply to contracts where the request for quotation and or invitation to tender templated documents are used (generally higher value) but it would not be feasible to undertake further checks at this stage or mandate the use of the document for all contracts.</p>

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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 April 2022  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Oxfordshire Plan 2050

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the report submitted to Scrutiny on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050.
<b>Key decision:</b>	Yes
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Liz Wade, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Cabinet Member:</b>	Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<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 01 February 2022, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report by Phillip Wadsworth on behalf of the Future Oxford Partnership, detailing the progress of the Oxfordshire Plan 2050, and in particular looking at responses to the most recent consultation exercise.
2. The Committee would like to give particular thanks to all those who attended: Councillor Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, Adrian Arnold, Head of Planning Services, and Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager. In addition to the length of the meeting, the

Committee recognises the difficulty of presenting a report written and owned by another organisation.

### **Summary and recommendation**

3. Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery explained a number of the challenges relating to the report – that he was able only to give personal views rather than speaking on behalf of the Cabinet or other participating Councils, and the difficulty and importance of aligning the processes for producing and scrutinising the drafts of the Oxfordshire Plan.
4. Rachel Williams, Planning Policy and Place Manager introduced the report. She highlighted that the process to deliver a development plan was lengthy, particularly when engaging in novel, cross-Council working. The Committee had had limited opportunity to make changes to the Regulation 18 consultation document, but those suggestions made by the Committee had been included within the Council's response. The present work was to refine policy options, involving listening to views from the last round of consultation, building the evidence base and testing what was practical, feasible and deliverable. These would be drawn together into a draft Regulation 19 consultation document, which would be subject to further opportunity for Scrutiny. However, it might be better to engage at an earlier stage whilst the document was less fixed.
5. Given Scrutiny's consideration lasted for over two hours, the discussion was wide-ranging, taking in clarifications of process issues around the Plan and the most recent Regulation 18 consultation – particularly with regard to Scrutiny's interaction with it, and policy around housing density, location of growth, and the Green Belt, and other areas to be discussed below. In total, the Committee makes six recommendations. These recommendations coalesce around these two key areas: i) issues pertaining to consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan, and ii) issues around particular policies.

### **Consultation on the Oxfordshire Plan 2050**

6. Much of the Committee's discussion focused on the usefulness of the consultation report. The form that the consultation report has taken, to present factually and transparently the totality of comments made as part of the consultation, has the benefit of being totally neutral. There is minimal engagement in the consultation report with what was said; instead the comments are allowed to speak for themselves. The potential for being accused of pre-judging decisions is minimised. Only afterwards the comments are logged are they then weighted up. However, this approach has a significant downside. In total, ten out of the thirty-two policy options and three out of the five spatial options provided no clear steer in the approach which should be taken, or views were fully polarised. The decision not to attribute comments to specific individuals or organisations may have been made so as not to distract from the import of the comments themselves. However, a consequence is that whilst all comments are presented equally, in the subsequent policy development stage they are not all

deemed equally valid. Making decisions where there are polarised views is a necessary part of developing a public strategy. However, it also obscures what, for many people is an important consideration: who is making comments, and whose comments tend to be accepted, and whose not? In particular, the Committee keenly felt that it was important to be able to delineate between the treatment of views of residents and those with other interests, particularly developers.

7. The Committee's suggestion to address this is the creation of a brief supplementary report for Cabinet to consider, focusing on those areas of disagreement within the consultation and who is arguing for what. The aim would be to bring greater understanding to the tensions between parties and the decisions made, thereby promoting greater transparency and accountability.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council requests a brief supplementary report for Cabinet to consider that focuses on the points of contention within the consultation in order that members (and the public) can understand what the political choices are that Oxford City Council is faced with. Further, that the Council requests that the supplementary report identifies consultation responses by respondent type, so that members (and the public) can understand where particular respondents are pressing for particular policy choices***

8. The Committee expressed concern that the consultation received only a total of 422 different responses. It is accepted that some of the respondents were organisations who speak on behalf of a larger number of individuals. Nevertheless, Oxfordshire is estimated to be home for approximately 700,000 individuals. This makes the response rate approximately 0.6%. As a further counterbalance to the fact that some respondents were organisations, it must be remembered that some were businesses also. It is not possible to give a precise number, but is safe to say that the engagement from individual Oxfordshire residents to the consultation was very low. The particular concern of the Committee is that the lower the participation, the less likely the responses are to be representative. Given that this is a plan which will shape the environment of the County for decades to come, ensuring all sections of the community are enabled to have input is critical.
9. A key problem perceived by the Committee for consultation on a plan such as this is the amount of knowledge and understanding it presupposes. A large volume of text is often a barrier in itself, let alone when their subject is technical. Simply presenting the document and asking the public to engage in consultation with it automatically excludes large numbers of people from having their voices heard.
10. The Committee accepts that with all its recommendations, the Council is only one of six partners in the production of the Plan, and that therefore the support of the Council is not sufficient on its own in seeing a recommendation put into practice. It also recognises that engaging and supporting a more demographically representative group of respondents will have consequences in terms of time and cost. Despite both these considerations, the Committee maintains the view that

on balance this so important a topic that it merits greater investment in getting a representative view from residents, and seeks that the Council work with its partners to see that this does happen in the future.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council seeks to ensure that future consultations on the plan involve greater depth of consultation amongst a more demographically representative group of respondents.***

11. Following on from the above, the report on the consultation references a focus group undertaken with support for participants to make their view known. The Committee does wish to recognise the positive engagement that there has been, and would like to see this developed further.
12. Based on its support for the approach taken in this instance, the Committee is particularly interested to hear the outcomes of the focus group. Indeed, on the basis of the higher investment in supporting attendees to reach an informed conclusion, the trust in the quality of responses by Members and the public may be higher. As such, the Committee would like to see the results by made publicly available and to be distributed to Members.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council requests that the results of the focus group undertaken as part of the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation be made publicly available and distributed to Members.***

### **Specific Policy Suggestions**

13. Policy option 03 in the Regulation 18 document which was put to consultation concerns water efficiency. It notes the importance of ensuring the balancing of water needs for communities, the natural environment and businesses. A lot of the discussion is on access to water and ensuring there is sufficient water available, with the Water Cycle Study informing the Plan. Ensuring access to water is one issue, but households and businesses rely on clean water. Growth to 2050 will put strains on the capacity of Thames Water to provide sufficient clean water, and will require investment to ensure there is sufficient capacity. This may be in hand, but the downside risks are of sufficient seriousness that the Committee wishes to raise its concerns to ensure that there is clear alignment between Thames Water's plans for investment in treatment works and those areas scheduled for growth.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council works with partners to ensure there is alignment between Thames Water's future investment plans for water treatment works and those areas outlined in Oxfordshire for growth.***

14. Policy option 16 concerns leisure, recreation, community and open space facilities. The section outlines the provisions in regards to strategic leisure provision. Suggested after the preferred policy option is an alternative, which adds to the existing proposals a policy to protect existing indoor and outdoor sports facilities and open spaces within the County. Given the importance of public space, particularly for those with less money, on physical health, mental health and wellbeing, the Committee is strongly supportive of this alternative

policy. Indeed, it would wish to see greater detail provided such that play areas, parks and nature reserves are explicitly included within this policy.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council supports the alternative policy option for policy 16, but with an extended remit to include play areas and parks and nature reserves as well.***

15. The Committee recognises that one of the key strategic priorities that the Council has been trying to ensure is embedded and prioritised within the Plan is the tackling of inequality and deprivation. Consequently, it does not ask for greater efforts in negotiations to see this reflected more strongly as it is understood that maximum effort has and is being put towards achieving this. Instead, the Committee makes a practical suggestion which seeks to make whatever is agreed more effective.

16. Inequality and deprivation are complex and entrenched issues, and a strategic response to them will necessarily need to cover a broad set of topics. The existing draft does not ignore these issues, covering, for example, job creation, housing numbers, air quality and skills and education needs. On the other hand, these are dispersed throughout the document. The Committee would expect that consolidating these topics into one section and explicitly looking at them through a specific lens reducing inequality and deprivation would have two benefits. Firstly, these topics have relevance beyond tackling inequality. Poor air quality, for example, impacts everybody. It just so happens that it impacts the poorest and most vulnerable more than others. Approaching them with this particular focus would frame and define them, pushing discussion and thinking of each one towards what the Council would see as higher priority considerations. Secondly, by amalgamating otherwise disparate topics makes much clearer their interactions and dependencies, allowing for a more joined up approach. The Committee understands that representations have been made to cut down the number of policies within the Plan; hopefully this existing position can be employed to further use to address more effectively one of the Council's key priorities.

***Recommendation 6: That the Council seeks that current relevant policies are amalgamated into one dedicated policy of how the Plan will reduce inequality and deprivation.***

### **Further Consideration**

17. The Committee is extremely keen that there should be further discussion on this topic. Following the meeting a meeting between the Chair and Vice-Chair of Scrutiny, the Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery and relevant officers discussed how best to do this. On top of the all-member briefing on growth figures taking place earlier this week, Scrutiny will be requesting a report in either June or July 2022 where it will be asked its views on the broad proposals.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 01/02/2022 concerning the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan**

**Response provided by Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery, Councillor Alex Hollingsworth**

17

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<p><b>1) That the Council requests a brief supplementary report for Cabinet to consider that focuses on the points of contention within the consultation in order that members (and the public) can understand what the political choices are that Oxford City Council is faced with. Further, that the Council requests that the supplementary report identifies consultation responses by respondent type, so that members (and the public) can understand where particular respondents are pressing for particular policy choices.</b></p>		<p>Oxford City Council, as with all the Councils who will need to consider the options for the 2050 Plan, will need to make policy decisions on all areas addressed within the Oxfordshire Plan. In doing so each Council will need to weigh up and take into account all the evidence that underpins the Plan, including the responses to each stage of consultation, sustainability appraisals and assessments of future need for housing and affordable housing. The hurdle for any formal Plan is that it passes the tests of soundness laid out in the NPPF, paragraph 35. The judgement that each Council will need to take is whether the proposed Plan passes those tests in all its policies; that includes testing policies that are the subject of polarised views and also those that are not. Reports put in front of Councils will need to explain the balance of views expressed through the various public consultations, but as part of a much wider assessment of the evidence that needs to be taken into account.</p>
<p><b>2) That the Council seeks to ensure that future consultations on the plan involve greater depth of consultation amongst a more demographically representative group of respondents.</b></p>		<p>It is crucial that as many different voices and points of view are heard in the production of the Oxfordshire Plan as possible to ensure that the best plan for the whole county is produced. The City Council will make the case for wide-reaching consultation using a range of tools to ensure everyone has the opportunity to get involved in the project, particularly those whose views are often not heard.</p>

<p><b>3) That the Council requests that the results of the focus group undertaken as part of the Regulation 18 Part 2 consultation be made publicly available and distributed to Members.</b></p>		<p>It is important that the results of all consultation exercises are reported as fully as possible, and that qualitative assessments are made as well as quantitative – the consultation is not a referendum. The City Council will ask for it to be published alongside the main consultation report.</p>
<p><b>4) That the Council works with partners to ensure there is alignment between Thames Water’s future investment plans for water treatment works and those areas outlined in Oxfordshire for growth.</b></p>		<p>It is important that the Oxfordshire Plan informs, and is informed by, the investment plans of service providers such as Thames Water. We will ask that the teams working on the Oxfordshire Plan and on the Oxfordshire Infrastructure Strategy engage with Thames Water on this basis, and will also do so with other statutory providers and public service organisations such as the NHS (ICS-BOB).</p>
<p><b>5) That the Council supports the alternative policy option for policy 16, but with an extended remit to include play areas and parks and nature reserves as well.</b></p>		<p>The Oxfordshire 2050 Plan is intended to offer a strategic level longer-term Plan that sits between the NPPF and individual Local Plans. It cannot contradict the NPPF, and it should not infringe onto the remit of Local Plans and Neighbourhood Plans. It is better that local policies on issues like parks and play areas be set locally, rather than have the 2050 Plan try to interfere with local priorities. The 2050 Plan should be limited to strategic level issues.</p>
<p><b>6) That the Council seeks that current relevant policies are amalgamated into one dedicated policy of how the Plan will reduce inequality and deprivation.</b></p>		<p>The City Council has been instrumental in ensuring that issues of inequality and deprivation are taken into account in development the Oxfordshire 2050 Plan. It is not currently clear that it would be better to have a single policy, which in a spatial plan might have limited leverage, as opposed to an overall objective leading to ‘golden thread’ through the whole range of policies in the Plan. The City Council will however continue to make the case that issues of inequality and deprivation are tackled head-on through the Oxfordshire Plan, in particular the</p>

		<p>need to properly address the ongoing shortfall in affordable housing across Oxfordshire. The City Council will not support a 2050 Plan that does not include policies to improve rather than worsen the affordability of housing for current and future generations.</p>
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**To:** Cabinet  
**Date:** 13 April 2022  
**Report of:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Title of Report:** DSS Discrimination Motion Update

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Housing and Homelessness Panel recommendations concerning the Council-requested update report on DSS Discrimination
<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 Walcott, Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security, and Housing the Homeless
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	More Affordable Housing
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Housing and Homelessness Strategy, Council 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 22 March 2022, the Housing and Homelessness Panel considered an update report on the progress made against actions sought by Council in a motion passed in July 2021.
2. The Panel would like to thank Ian Wright, Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety for authoring the report, presenting it at the meeting and responding to the Panel's questions.

## Summary and recommendation

3. Ian Wright presented the report, outlining the progress taken against the actions required by the Council's motion. Of the five actions, four had been implemented in full: a revision of the OCLAS code to outlaw DSS discrimination, to raise the issue with the Welfare Reform team, to inform and train Housing Officers to recognise and refer cases of DSS discrimination to the Welfare Reform team, and to use multimedia communications to raise awareness of the issue. The latter had been particularly successful, with other Councils such as Bristol, landlord groups and national charities all enquiring for more information from the Council. The Council's website also had a specific page on recognising and responding to DSS discrimination, with links to Shelter's advice pages.
4. The one area which had not been fully completed, to establish a tenants' forum was significantly progressed, with invitations to get involved having gone out, and the first meeting expected to take place within the next month.
5. In its response the Panel raised questions over a number of areas including:
  - Landlord responses
  - Future resourcing of the forum and monitoring of the prevalence of DSS discrimination
  - The working relationship between the forum and the Housing and Homelessness Panel.
6. In addition to these, the Panel discussed and wishes to make two recommendations around broadening access to the Council's measures to prevent DSS discrimination, and potential issues around including both social and private rented sector tenants in the same forum.

## Broadening Access

7. The original motion required that the Council 'Use official communication and media activities to improve awareness, as well as denouncing discrimination against benefits claimants clearly on the Council website, with a dedicated page detailing ways to recognise DSS discrimination and what actions to take in response.'<sup>1</sup> In this it has been very successful, with articles coming out on national rental websites like Landlordzone and The Negotiator. The work was also picked up on social media and praised by Shelter. The Panel welcomes this. It understands that the Council's mission is not solely directed towards improving the lives of its immediate residents but to lead on campaigning for broader change and is pleased to see the Council having a national-level impact.
8. Thankfully, national campaigning and local-level impact are far from mutually exclusive. Indeed, the more of a difference the Council can demonstrate locally,

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<sup>1</sup>The website page can be found at:

[https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20267/private\\_housing\\_tenants/1515/discrimination\\_against\\_benefits\\_claimants](https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20267/private_housing_tenants/1515/discrimination_against_benefits_claimants)

the more weight its model carries at a national level. In discussion, the Panel identified one area where the Council could improve the reach of its messaging.

9. Locally, the Council's messaging has been primarily targeted at individuals suffering DSS discrimination: how to recognise it, to make victims aware that it is illegal, and the support that is available to them. However, to date there have been no reports made to the Welfare Reform team of discrimination. This could be interpreted as a sign that DSS discrimination is not occurring, but the more likely explanation is that the direct messaging from the Council has not reached those who need it. The Panel's suggestion is that the Council need not try to communicate with these individuals directly. There are a lot of third party organisations – advice centres, tenant unions, charities and community groups – who come into contact with individuals likely to encounter DSS discrimination. The reach of the Council's messaging on this topic would be extended greatly by making those organisations aware of the support available.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council contacts relevant third party agencies such as advice centres, unions and community groups, to make them aware of the support available to those who have faced DSS discrimination.***

### **Composition of the Forum**

10. The exact wording of the motion passed by Council in regarding the composition of the newly-established tenants' forum is as follows, that it: 'be composed of community groups and stakeholders representing tenants, both in private and council housing'. It is the Panel's view that a forum for both private rented sector and social tenants may not be optimal. The issues faced by and remedies available to tenants in social housing and the private rented sector are very different. If the aim of a tenants' forum is to give a platform for tenant voices to be heard putting two groups with very different interests could dilute the relevance to both. The Panel wishes to see tenants from both sectors given a voice, but it does query whether this setup fully enables this goal. Indeed, in the longer run, if there is too much which is not relevant to participants then ongoing involvement by members could actually reduce, which would undermine the forum's purpose.
11. Given that this has been endorsed by Council it would be overreach for Scrutiny to suggest that this should be changed. As a critical friend to the Council, however, the Panel does raise its concerns. Its recommendation is that this issue be raised with forum members, and that they be given ownership over how, what is ultimately their forum, not the Council's, is composed and what its focus should be.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council asks forum members whether they believe the forum should seek to cover private rented sector and social tenants simultaneously.***

## Further Consideration

12. As part of its discussions over continued monitoring around the extent of DSS discrimination locally the Housing and Homelessness Panel has agreed to add this topic to its list of items for next years' work plan. It is anticipated that the report will be considered in a years' time.
13. A final issue that the Panel wishes to raise is in relation to the ongoing interaction between the forum and the Housing and Homelessness Panel. The Panel welcomes Council's suggestion to invite representatives on a bi-annual basis to discuss topics of relevance. Preparation for this is underway. However, the Panel does also feel it is necessary to underline that it, nor Scrutiny generally, is not a decision-making body. Its impact is indirect, pursuing enquiries and making recommendations. There is value to this, but the Panel considers that to ensure the full potential from the forum is realised that Council cannot rely on Scrutiny alone. Instead, it must also allow the forum to have direct influence on policy through joint-working between its representatives and relevant Cabinet members and senior officers.

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**Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made on 22/03/2022 concerning the DSS Discrimination Motion Update report**

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

<b><i>Recommendation</i></b>	<b><i>Agree?</i></b>	<b><i>Comment</i></b>
<b>1) That the Council contacts relevant third party agencies such as advice centres, unions and community groups, to make them aware of the support available to those who have faced DSS discrimination.</b>		
<b>2) That the Council asks forum members whether they believe the forum should seek to cover private rented sector and social tenants simultaneously.</b>		

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Date of Cabinet Meeting:

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# **Tenant Involvement and Empowerment: A Mini-Review**

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**Report of the Housing and Homelessness Panel**  
Commissioned by Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee

March 2022

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# Foreword by the Chair



Oxford City Council is deliberately unusual in that it has retained responsibility for its social housing stock rather than creating an arms-length housing association. It is responsible for 7,800 homes throughout the city. A key rationale for this decision is that retaining responsibility for these homes gives the Council control over how they are run, which gives the Council greater opportunity to ensure higher satisfaction and better outcomes for its tenants. It also provides the Council a challenge to realise that potential. On this, the Council has had reasonable success; in the recent tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey 85% of respondees stated they were satisfied with the Council's customer service. However, this overall satisfaction masks a number of areas in which the feedback from tenants has been less positive.

The most concerning statistic is that 55% of tenants reported that their views are listened to and acted upon; almost half of all respondees fed back the view that the Council does not listen or act upon their views. For a Council which deliberately has retained control of its housing to deliver a better service to tenants, to ignore this would undermine its very rationale and prove right those who doubt that the Council listens to its tenants.

The Council's Housing function faces significant change: from government with the progress of the Social Housing white paper towards becoming law, and to its internal structure with the merging of the Housing and Communities directorates. In undertaking this review, I hope that Scrutiny can make meaningful suggestions as to how to involve and empower tenants more, and put at the centre of the structure which emerges after these changes the improved self-determination, greater dignity and higher satisfaction that true collaboration brings.

**Councillor Linda Smith, Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel**

# Chapter 1: Introduction

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1. Each year the Scrutiny Committee undertakes two Review Groups, one to scrutinise the proposed Budget, and the other on a topic of its choosing with a view to taking a closer look at a topic of particular interest. This report is classed as a 'mini-review' and is an innovation of the Chair of the Housing and Homelessness Panel, Councillor Linda Smith. Instead of holding a traditional Review Group - with a specific membership appointed, a wide number of external witnesses invited to contribute, and a series of dedicated meetings - this mini-review has been incorporated into the work plan of the Housing and Homelessness Panel. At each of its meetings over the past civic year the Housing and Homelessness Panel has had one or more reports and presentations on different aspects on the selected topic, with a composite report provided in response. Necessarily, therefore, it has been slimmed down relative to a full Review Group. However, it is hoped that by focusing its energy on one particular topic throughout the year Scrutiny has engaged in the area of its activity where it can add most value to the Council, deep dives into topics.
2. The topic chosen for this mini-review, tenant involvement and empowerment, is a timely one. As a social landlord, significant legislative changes are underway to recast the relationship between social landlords and their tenants, partially in light of the failings of the Grenfell tragedy. The various elements of the government's Social Housing White Paper are expected to be drafted into law through regulation and regulation over the next few years. Furthermore, the Council itself is undergoing significant organisational change, integrating the Housing and Communities directorates with a view to delivering a more joined-up service. Finally, in 2021 the Council undertook its first survey of tenant satisfaction since 2015, providing valuable feedback on the views of tenants. A key theme which unites all these changes is a concern to improve the welfare of Council tenants, which is welcome. However, the Panel's focus has been to use these changes as a vehicle to explore a more fundamental question, how can tenants become more empowered and engaged amidst these changes? After all, who is best placed to make decisions in the best interests of tenants, but tenants themselves?
3. As referenced above, this report is based on a slimmed down review process, meaning a smaller number of individuals have been involved. The Housing and Homeless Panel is comprised of:
  - Councillor Linda Smith (Chair)
  - Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers
  - Councillor Lizzy Diggins
  - Councillor Laurence Fouweather
  - Councillor Chris Jarvis
  - Councillor Liz Wade
4. The Panel heard four reports over the course of the year: one to introduce the Council's current tenant involvement work, a second to outline the main changes proposed by the Social Housing White Paper, a third to review the results of the STAR tenant satisfaction survey, and the last to review the activity of the Council in responding to both the White Paper and the tenant satisfaction survey. This report therefore welcomed the knowledge and input of the following officers:

- Stephen Gabriel, Executive Director of Communities and People
  - Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing
  - Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager
  - Simon Warde, Tenant Involvement Team Manager
  - Wendy Hind, Tenant Involvement Team Officer
5. To ensure tenant's voices were heard and included, six tenant ambassadors from different elements of the Council's tenant involvement functions were invited to attend and participate in discussion.
- Tony Buchanan (Housing Ombudsman Residents' Panel)
  - Susan Carson (IDA-ASB Group)
  - Anthony Church (Stakeholder Interviews)
  - Geno Humphrey (Tender Evaluation)
  - Brenda Walton (Tender Evaluation)
  - Olga Siddons (Environmental Improvement)
  - Dave Simons (Great Estates)
6. The Panel would like to place on record its thanks to all of the people who contributed to the review, which has enabled the recommendations in the report to be made.
7. This report will be presented to the Council's Scrutiny Committee for endorsement on 05 April 2022, and subsequently to the Cabinet on 13 April. On the grounds that even a mini-review generates a significant number of recommendations, responses to these recommendations are not requested until the 15 June Cabinet meeting.

# Chapter 2: Findings and Recommendations

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## The Current Work of the Tenant Involvement Team

8. The Tenant Involvement Team is comprised of four permanent staff, and an apprentice. It exists to ensure compliance with the Regulator's 'Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Standard' through tenant involvement in the development, monitoring and scrutiny of Council tenant and leaseholder services. It is important to note from the outset that it is a historically successful team, holding Tenant Participation Advisory Service accreditation since 2016, being awarded Team of the Year that same year, and presenting at national conferences. Further, it is extremely apparent that all the tenant ambassadors, those tenants who take on a representative role, really value the support and enablement provided through the work of this team. It is important to recognise, however, that the Tenant Involvement Team is not the sole locus of tenant involvement, with the Consultation, Tenancy Management and Communities teams all regularly engaging tenants on different issues.
9. The work of the team is broadly split over three areas. The first is the groundwork for meaningful engagement, which is communication and relationship development. The team runs multiple communications channels, such as the (well-regarded) Tenants In Touch magazine, Facebook and tenant involvement web pages. In addition to this, the team also runs skills sessions for tenants, such as crafts, cookery and first aid. In addition to the skills developed, this provides a forum to nurture relationships with tenants, understand their concerns, and potentially identify those who want to become involved in shaping the Housing service in a more formalised way.
10. The second major area is to enable successful involvement of those who want to become more formally involved, the tenant ambassadors. Tenant ambassadors are involved a wide variety of fora:
  - *Stakeholder interviews.* Tenant ambassadors are involved in the stakeholder interviews of job candidates within the Housing directorate. To prepare them, Ambassadors are briefed beforehand - where the advert, job description and person specification are talked through – and given the opportunity for clarification. Model answers to questions are provided. During the interviews themselves, ambassadors are asked to score responses to the questions. These scores are fed back as part of the wider interview process. Ambassador involvement does not stop there, however, as chats with ambassadors also forms part of the induction process for suitable candidates.
  - *Tender evaluations.* A number of ambassadors have been trained by the Council to look at new contracts, as well as renewal tenders. When tender documentation is received by the Council it is passed on to participating tenant ambassadors, who score each one against the same matrix as Council officers. The only difference is that – at the request of the tenant ambassadors – the price is not included. Ambassadors are supported by council officers if they need help with clarification of technical issues. Having scored each tender individually, a joint meeting between ambassadors and council officers is held, where a consensus

score is reached. The procurement team subsequently add in the effect of the different prices offered to determine the favoured contractor.

- *Housing Ombudsman Residents' Panel*. This involves national level work, but also working with the Council to establish and maintain a complaints procedure in accordance with good practice recommended by the Housing Ombudsman. It also seeks to ensure that tenants are satisfied that it follows the new regulatory requirements as set out in the new Complaints Handling Code.
- *Great Estates*. Great Estates is the Council's programme to identify improvements to locality areas in need of upgrades and improvement. The level of involvement requires between two to four meetings per month with stakeholders of the Great Estates programme. The role of the ambassador is to identify areas suitable for makeovers, collecting resident views and ideas and ensuring they are put forward, and scoping proposals for upgrades. Stakeholder meetings, including ambassadors, are then held to agree priorities between different proposals.

11. The final area of focus is on service development and change. The Social Housing white paper requires much input from the Tenant Involvement team, but there are related areas of work from the Building Safety Bill and the Fire Safety Bill also. The team's major area of focus, however, is on establishing a Housing Development Working Group to involve tenants in the pre-planning stages of development sites and post-completion inspections to ensure they are of satisfactory standard, particularly in light of the acceleration of house building the Council plans to engage in over the coming decade.

## **Observations and Recommendations**

12. The first observation made by the Panel is that although there is much good work being done, it is ad hoc. Tenant involvement is not built into the processes of the Council but an extra which is included. Thus, for example, there are no guidelines as to when tenants should be consulted in relation to procurement. At the moment this consultation relies on the commitment to good practice of officers, and could easily become marginalised if capacity were to be squeezed. The ease with which tenants can be overlooked is perhaps better illustrated by the fact that neither the appointment of the Executive Director of Communities and People or the Head of Housing Services had any input from tenants. These are two missed opportunities, and show why building tenant involvement into the Council's processes is vital for it to endure. The Panel would wish to see that the Council draws up guidelines of values above which procurement ambassadors will be offered the opportunity to become involved, or job gradings within Housing Services above which they will be invited be part of the interview process.

***Recommendation 1: That the Council identifies appropriate thresholds above which procurement or interview-focused ambassadors will be invited to be involved in the respective process.***

13. A key element in establishing any cultural change in an organisation is not just the processes, but the ownership and drive to realise that change by senior individuals. At present, this appears to be lacking. Both tenant ambassadors and the Tenant Involvement team highlighted their wish to see a regular forum established with relevant Cabinet members, senior officers and tenant and leaseholder representatives to bring up issues, but also to report on progress of issues. As referenced in the Chair's foreword, if only 55% of respondees to the tenant satisfaction survey feel that their views are heard

and acted upon then there is a disconnect which requires urgent remedy. Simply putting tenant representatives and senior individuals from the Council in the same room is a good start to addressing this, and the Panel would like to see this done as a matter of priority.

***Recommendation 2: That the Council establishes a board with Cabinet member, senior officers and tenant and leaseholder representatives to meet on a regular basis to discuss tenant and leaseholder issues, and to report on progress and performance.***

14. In addition to the creation of the board, the Panel also has suggestions to make as to its composition. It is accepted that there must be a degree of pragmatism as to who is best placed to act as a tenant representative. However, the Panel does urge the Council to make strong efforts to ensure that, so far as possible, tenant representatives reflect the demographic and geographical diversity of the Council's tenants. Doing so will ensure that specific groups within the body of tenants who might face particular issues are provided the opportunity to make their voices heard.

***Recommendation 3: That the Council makes the greatest effort to ensure that tenant representatives on the board reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of the Council's tenants.***

15. As a slight aside, to the above, the Panel is keen to stress that the board should operate in addition to and above the Council's existing tenant involvement activities and should in no way be a replacement for them. This is particularly important because there are tenants who are involved with the Council and making very valuable contributions, for whom a board would not be a forum in which they would feel comfortable.

16. A further point to make is that the Panel was particularly keen in discussion about the prospects of establishing a Housing Development Working Group. In a situation where a significant minority of tenants do not feel satisfied with the quality of their own home<sup>1</sup>, giving existing tenants the power to shape council homes and check the suitability of homes for let is eminently sensible. In discussion, it was established that plans had not been to give tenants a say on internal design issues, more the big picture topics. However, in many ways, the nuts and bolts of creating a nice home are largely the issues that people care about because they can relate it to their own home. The Panel feels it is important, therefore, that interior design ideas are included within the Housing Development Working Group's scope. With this change of focus, however, the Panel does suggest a name change would be in order to more closely reflect its purpose.

***Recommendation 4: That the Council establishes the planned Housing Development Working Group as a matter of priority, that it includes within its scope issues relating to interior design of the homes built, and that a more precise name is agreed.***

17. Finally, the Panel discussed in depth the fact that all tenant ambassadors do so in a voluntary capacity. They are not paid for the time they spend as ambassadors. Whilst the Panel supports this view, it does also recognise that the effort and dedication they exhibit should be recognised if not remunerated. This wish, however, comes up against a

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<sup>1</sup> See the following section on the Tenant Satisfaction Survey for more details.

practical problem: if done incorrectly, the way that an ambassador is recognised may be considered a payment in kind, and trigger a claw back of benefits. Clearly, the Council must ensure that in trying to recognise the contribution of ambassadors it does not inadvertently cause them to be penalised. This does not mean, however, that the idea should be given up as being too difficult. The Panel considers this to be an important principle, and would like to see it implemented. The following ideas have not been tested, but arose from the Panel's discussions and are included for follow-up. They are: invitations of tenant ambassadors to civic functions such as the Lord Mayor's Ball, holding a specific thank you 'bash' for all ambassadors, long-service recognition, and free leisure centre access. It is accepted that they may not be suitable for all ambassadors, but the Panel would prefer to see some efforts made towards recognition, even if they are not universally accessible.

***Recommendation 5: That the Council implements ways to recognise the contributions of tenant ambassadors which do not incur universal credit clawback or other benefit issues.***

## Findings of the STAR Tenant Satisfaction Survey

18. From May to July 2021 the Council undertook its tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey, the first since 2015. Given the period since the previous survey and the low response-rate previously, the Council did not consult with just a sample of tenants but made significant efforts by mail, phone, telephone and personal visits to hear from all its tenants and leaseholders. In total, 1579 tenants (23%) and 84 leaseholders (12%) responded. Though not exhaustive, this level of feedback provides reliable data on the trends found amongst the Council's tenants and, to a lesser degree, its leaseholders.
19. The responses show some clear areas of strength:
- 85% are satisfied with our customer service
  - 81% believe their rent is value for money
  - 80% feel safe and secure in their home
20. In terms of value for money, Oxford's result compares with a national figure of 43%. The Council also outperforms national average on how the Council runs things, being kept well informed, trust and acting on concerns. However, the reason the Council runs its own housing service is to outperform, and whilst the comparisons with elsewhere may be favourable, there are also areas of underperformance when the bald figures are presented. In particular:
- 76% are satisfied with the Council as a landlord
  - 67% are satisfied with the quality of the home
  - 55% believe tenants' views are listened to and acted upon
  - 49% are satisfied with the outcome of an antisocial behaviour (ASB) complaint
21. To put this another way, one in four tenants are dissatisfied with the Council as a landlord, approximately 2,000. One in three are not satisfied with the quality of their own home, 2,600. And only just over one in two believe tenants views are listened to and acted upon. It is important that some context be provided regarding the figures generally, and the lower two in particular. In surveying tenants in 2021 the Council did so at a point

where much of the population was fed up, having experienced lengthy lockdowns, including the cancellation of Christmas. These lockdowns also reduced the capability of the Council to get into tenants' homes to undertake repairs, meaning a less responsive service. Given that the single most important driver of both satisfaction and dissatisfaction is the repairs service, inevitably these factors will have hit figures. Likewise, the latter two are likely linked; the Council has a policy position over anti-social behaviour, which was endorsed by Scrutiny - that the Council's ASB approach should be about protecting victims rather than punishing perpetrators. It is clear that many of those who suffer ASB do not share the Council's views. On the face of it, this may prove problematic to the Panel's wish to see greater empowerment of tenants. However, it should be remembered that perpetrators are likely to be tenants also, who have their own vulnerabilities and who need support to change more than punishment.

22. Notwithstanding the caveats above, that barely one in two tenants believe their views are listened to and acted upon by the Council is telling. It is the view of the Panel that this statistic may flow into other areas of underperformance, such as satisfaction with the Council as a landlord, and satisfaction with the quality of the home.
23. The Council does already have an action plan to address the issues arising from the tenant satisfaction survey, as well preparing for the requirements of the Social Housing white paper. Many of the proposed changes will enable greater tenant involvement and empowerment. For example, improvements to the tracking of repairs will enable tenants to hold the Council accountable. Technological solutions to allow tenants to give feedback on key aspects of the work received will drive up standards, as will a policy to contact anybody rating the service below seven out of ten for a follow-up call. Some, such as more effective inventory management will drive up standards but without involving or empowering tenants. The Panel has reviewed this plan in detail and is supportive of its proposals, but makes the following recommendations.<sup>2</sup>

## **Observations and Recommendations**

24. An interesting sub-current to the overall figures are the level of satisfaction by age, which show a clear correlation between age and satisfaction or, to put it another way, that the younger people are, the less satisfied they are with key aspects of the Council's service. The data are as follows:

	Under 25	25 – 59	60+
Overall satisfaction	58%	70%	85%
Quality of the home	42%	57%	81%
Repairs and Maintenance	63%	71%	84%

25. Demographically, the Council's tenants skew heavily towards older people, meaning that there are many fewer younger tenants than older ones. As such, the dissatisfaction of this cohort is drowned out in the overall figures, but the difference is significant, with levels of satisfaction falling by a range of 21-39% between the youngest and oldest age

<sup>2</sup> For completeness, the results of the tenant satisfaction survey and the progress against the action plan are included as Appendix 1 and Appendix 2 to this report respectively.

groups. This is stark, and an issue of concern that a significant majority of younger tenants are dissatisfied with the quality of the home provided by the Council.

26. The Panel raised this issue with officers, and it is something they were aware of. However, no precise reason could be given. Those younger respondees who assented to be contacted for follow-ups from the survey are being contacted, to learn what the reasons are. The Panel certainly welcomes this. However, finding out something is wrong and then finding out how to fix it is a reactive solution, and a sub-optimal one. The Panel ventures to suggest that greater representation of younger tenants amongst the tenant ambassadors might be more effective in preventing issues from arising in the first place.

***Recommendation 6: That the Council recruits more tenant ambassadors from younger age groups, particularly to participate in the Housing Development Working Group and Great Estates***

27. On almost the exact flipside to the above, the Panel also identified that there is a need for help for older people. Over 3000 of the Council's properties include a tenant over 65. Although tenant services and management formed a small number of the overall comments on how the Council could improve, at just 3%, within that help for older residents and those with health issues emerged as the key concern, receiving more than twice as many comments as the next nearest. This suggests that there is an issue, and given the size of this cohort it needs to be addressed. It is important to recognise, however, that the Council does not receive funding for activities beyond issues relating to broader topics beyond the home itself. Nevertheless, it appears there is sufficient demand to require one and the Panel recommends, therefore, that a specific tenant ambassador should be recruited to represent the views and needs of older people, particularly those who are frail or in need of medical assistance.

***Recommendation 7: That the Council recruits a tenant ambassador to represent the views of older, frailer residents.***

28. The issue regarding young tenants illustrates how genuine needs amongst a minority can be crowded out when included in large populations. In Oxford, it is the case for young people. However, the Panel is concerned that it can also be the case for groups bound together by geography. The Council has the capacity to analyse responses to the survey by ward, but not more granular than that. This is still a significant improvement on a city-wide level of reporting. This is important, because the Council has Communities budgets which, to date, have been administered separately to Housing budgets. Part of the justification for joining them is to provide a more unified service; the Panel's view is that the survey is a very useful source of information on the issues experienced by individuals in a locality and would guide and enrich Communities budgets.
29. Though perhaps not strictly a tenant involvement or engagement issue, Panel members voiced the view that it was likely all members would want to know the results for their wards, but that a fuller and more complete picture would emerge if that data were to be considered alongside new census results and the views of locality workers it could provide a strong basis for understanding and planning locality-based work.

***Recommendation 8: That the Council interrogates the data at ward-level from the census (when available), and the tenant satisfaction survey, alongside the knowledge of locality workers to develop a profile of the specific needs of each ward, and that this is shared with members and used to identify priorities for work planning at community level.***

30. The following recommendation is fairly high-level, seeking to address the fact that only 55% of tenants believe the Council listens to and acts upon their comments. Council tenants have a particular relationship with the Council, which brings a lot of extra rights, obligations and expectations. At present, this special identity is not well reflected in the Council's structures. Tenants have a relationship with the Council generally, and with ODS, the Council's contractor. It is the view of the Panel that there is little for tenants to engage with when they want to engage with the Council specifically in its role as landlord. If tenants are to feel as though they are being listened to and their concerns acted upon, it is important that they know how to engage with the Council at the right level. To enable this, the Panel feels that a clearer Housing identity is developed, distinct from both the Council generally and ODS, so that tenants are clear where to make their comments to ensure they will be listened to and acted upon.

***Recommendation 9: That the Council works to develop a distinct Housing identity***

31. Linked to the above is the topic of nomenclature. It is a point relevant to Housing and involving tenants, but goes beyond it. The Panel's view is that the language the Council uses to describe its relationship with its tenants (but also residents more generally) shapes the nature of that relationship. To this end, the Panel takes against the use of words such as 'customer' and 'client' on the basis that it presupposes that the commercial aspect of the relationship is the key one. Whilst there is a pecuniary element to the Council's relationship with its residents, particularly its tenants, it is absolutely not the defining feature. The Panel would wish to challenge the regular use of phrases such as 'customer' and 'client' in Council reports, and to re-centre the relationship through more accurate descriptors, such as 'tenant' or 'resident'.

***Recommendation 10: That the Council ceases to make reference to 'customers' or 'clients' in its reports unless the relationship is genuinely commercial.***

32. Concurrent to this report is a report from the Housing and Homelessness Panel on a motion relating to DSS discrimination. One of the outcomes from the motion was the establishment of a forum for private sector and Council tenants to air issues. However, as the other report suggests, it questions whether the needs of Council and private tenants are sufficiently aligned to complement each other and has recommended that the forum should be given the option to split. The Housing and Homelessness Panel is keen that should such a split occur, that given the relative numbers of private rented sector tenants and the acuteness of abuses that the needs of Council tenants are not overlooked. Notwithstanding the fact that the problems for Council tenants are less numerous or acute than those in the private rented sector, the Panel believes that an open forum, where Council tenants can raise particular issues without a long-term commitment, is a useful facility in addressing the fact only 55% of tenants believe their comments are listened to and acted upon.

***Recommendation 11: That in the event that the Tenants Forum established by the DSS discrimination motion does decide not to pursue a joint Council and private***

rented sector structure, that the Council ensures that a Council Tenants Forum continues to be provided.

## The Social Housing White Paper

33. The tragedy at Grenfell, albeit belatedly, exposed serious deficiencies in the regulation and operation of social housing providers in relation to tenant safety. To that end, central government has put forward a white paper outlining a transformational change in the relationship between social landlords and their tenants. Whilst safety is the overriding theme, empowering tenants is a key enabler towards this end and was therefore considered by the Panel.
34. As in the preceding section, the Panel considered the impacts and readiness of the Council to implement the white paper *in total*, including those elements less directly linked to tenant engagement and empowerment. This report, however, does not intend to provide a comprehensive introduction to the white paper and instead focuses on those relevant elements. Again, for completeness, the presentation made to the Panel is attached to this report as Appendix 3, which provides a more complete introduction to the full breadth of the changes and implications of this legislation.
35. Briefly, the white paper is a tenants' charter, outlining seven fundamental rights of a social tenant:
- *To be safe in your home.* More stringent safety requirements will be enacted, but also greater individualisation of those requirements. For example, having up to date personal emergency evacuation plans (PEEPs) based on individuals' own situations. Ascertaining this degree of individualisation will require much more contact with tenants, and significant resource has been added to the Council's budget to enable this.
  - *To know how your landlord is performing.* The Council would be required to inform every tenant, at least once a year, on its performance. Proscribed information focuses on compliance with multiple safety measures, the Decent Homes Standard, success in resolving complaints promptly and fairly, management and handling of anti-social behaviour and levels of tenant satisfaction over a number of key areas such as engagement, health and safety, overall condition, repairs handling, management of communal spaces, and the wider neighbourhood. Also included within performance reporting all social landlords are required to make available information on spending, and be subject to challenge by residents if spending was thought not to be in the right place.
  - *To have complaints dealt with promptly and fairly.* The biggest change, a move from a three stage to a two stage complaints procedure has already been implemented by the Council.
  - *To be treated with respect.* A key foundation of the approach is that providers co-regulate with their tenants, which stresses the ongoing importance of the Tenant Ambassadors programme and the extensions identified to it in the recommendations above.

- *To have your voice heard by your landlord.* Under the proposals, social landlords would need to actively seek out best practice, including through training of staff and empowerment of tenants, of ways to improve engagement by tenants with their landlords. Practically, this will mean mandatory visits by the Council, instead of the present situation when if residents are living happily in their homes with no major life events or issues there is nothing to prompt a visit. These tenant meeting will seek to: find out what matters to each tenant; check on the general condition of the home (unreported repairs/damp); gather information on protected characteristics, contact preferences, reasonable adjustments needed and contacts; promote tenant portal to aid channel shift and effective reporting of repairs.
- *To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in.* A lot of work is being implemented to raise home standards, but this is an extension of an existing duty. The more novel duty is the provider's responsibility towards improving the neighbourhood, via physical infrastructure, the tackling of antisocial behaviour and health and wellbeing initiatives. The prioritisation of this work, particularly in light of the feedback from tenants regarding antisocial behaviour, will require strong tenant involvement.
- *To be supported to take your first steps to ownership.* With Oxford's high house prices, even at a reduced rate this is a minor issue.

## **Observations and Recommendations**

36. It is perhaps useful to clarify terms at this point. There is a difference meant between tenant engagement and tenant involvement. Both are important steps towards empowering tenants and the delineation between them is not absolute, but generally speaking the focus on tenant engagement is about landlords having contact with their tenants, knowing their needs and wants. Tenant involvement focuses more on the tenant, and is about giving tenants greater say in decisions over their homes and neighbourhoods. The Social Housing white paper is heavier on tenant engagement than tenant involvement. This is welcomed by the Panel as important, but it also means there are fewer relevant issues for recommendations than might be imagined for legislation which seeks to recast the relationship between tenants and social housing providers back in favour of tenants.
37. The first set of recommendations recognises that good quality tenant involvement has as a prerequisite tenants who are informed. The Social Housing white paper outlines much more extensive reporting duties than beforehand. The Panel supports this principle, but actually feels that the Council could, and should, go further and faster than the requirements. Discussions with officers suggest that through being linked in with the QL system, live reporting is available instead of just providing the mandatory annual report. The Panel feels it is important that this should be implemented, and also that regular publicising of the Council's performance should occur, for example regularly including performance as part of the Tenants in Touch newsletter. The Panel also suggests that to provide a fuller and more balanced context to results presented, the Council should not just publish its results on their own, but should provide the data of relevant comparator social housing providers also when doing so. And finally, because this accountability and sharing of information with tenants is so important, the Panel would wish to see this

implemented as soon as possible. The Housing and Homelessness Panel expects to be requesting this information to be submitted as a regular dashboard as part of its performance scrutiny of housing in the forthcoming civic year.

***Recommendation 12: That the Council prioritises the collection of the KPIs required for distribution by the Social Housing white paper.***

***Recommendation 13: That the Council publishes, in addition to the annual report required by the Social Housing white paper, live performance data on its website, and distributes performance details to tenants in each Tenants in Touch magazine.***

***Recommendation 14: That in its reporting against Social Housing white paper KPIs the Council benchmarks against relevant comparators***

38. As part of its annual report on performance, the Council must publish details of its spending, proposals which are subject to challenge by residents if they are not found to be in the right place. This is all well, but for it to be more than just a theoretical right a formal structure must be in place to enable it, and residents must know how to make use of it. Currently, tenants are provided with details of the Council's HRA spending proposals via a special edition of Tenants in Touch as part of the budget and invited to make comments. The Panel queries whether this is satisfactory. Tenants may approve of, for example, budget provision to improve energy efficiency, but may be implacably opposed to particular items of spend within that, heat pumps for example. An annual consultation on a highly complex, high level document appears to fall short. To be meaningful, communication work must be undertaken with those who want to be involved in discussions to explain the complexities of the budget, the ability to challenge spending at a level more granular than the Budget must be enabled, and the ability to raise challenge in a timely fashion.
39. As an aside, the value of communication and involvement can be seen by previous efforts made by Housing to involve interested tenants. At a time when the Council was wishing to use money within the HRA to build more social houses, tenants were supportive of the policy when the issues were presented to them. This was despite the fact it would mean both rental increases for themselves, and less spare money to invest in their homes and neighbourhoods. This is a good example of the way tenant involvement can help all parties move together to develop policy and financial priorities which have the support of all those concerned.

***Recommendation 15: That the Council reviews whether the structures to enable tenants to challenge areas of spend under the Social Housing white paper are sufficient to give tenants meaningful challenge to Council spending***

40. With the responsibility on the Council as a landlord to improve not only homes but neighbourhoods under the white paper, the £1.1m per year Great Estates programme is expected to become increasingly important. However, it was the view of members that although significant sums were involved, even experienced members did not understand the process for identifying and influencing priorities. It was surmised that if the process to influence Great Estates project priorities was opaque to council members, it would also likewise prove difficult to influence for tenants. The Panel wishes to draw attention to this

issue, and ask that clarification for members and tenants on how they can be involved in the process is provided.

***Recommendation 16: That the Council implements and promotes a clearer process for councillors and tenants to influence the spending of the Great Estates programme.***

41. A lot of the changes in the Social Housing white paper are regulatory and beyond the purview of this report. However, amidst the tightening of external regulation there is also a reminder of the responsibilities of those in charge to ensure safe homes are provided. “It is the responsibility of the boards of housing associations and other private providers of social housing, *or of Councillors in local authority landlords*, to be assured that they comply with the outcome focused standards set by the regulator.” Unfortunately, there are times when tenants are legitimately dissatisfied with the quality of their home, or the work that has been done to it, and they are struggling to get this addressed. One important avenue to seek help is their local ward member. Panel members, however, have stated that they, unlike councillors in other authorities, do not have access to a casework management system to check on progress of activity. When this was discussed with officers it was suggested that the QL system could provide this service, the biggest difficulty to be addressed being GDPR issues. Whilst a challenge, it does not appear to be insurmountable, and the value to tenants of having a councillor know in real time the progress of an intractable issue is significant. The Panel recommends that the Council sets up such a system within the next 12 months.

***Recommendation 17: That the Council implements a councillor casework system for housing issues within QL within 12 months***

42. The tenant satisfaction survey indicated that anti-social behaviour (ASB) is a clear area of dissatisfaction amongst tenants, with only 49% satisfied with the outcome of an ASB complaint. On its own, this is a strong reason for the Panel to investigate. However, as mentioned above, under the duty in the Social Housing white paper to provide good quality neighbourhoods, the tackling of ASB is a key focus, which provides further reason to do so.

43. Reductions to police resources over the past decade have reduced the scope of police forces, including Thames Valley Police, to devote energy to non-core work. Community policing has been especially hard hit in this regard. Previously, Neighbourhood Action Groups allowed the police, council staff and members of local communities to convene to discuss issues of concern and coordinate responses.<sup>3</sup> This model was valuable. Discussions from Panel members suggests that some additional money may have recently been made available to the Police for community policing. The Panel encourages the Council to investigate the details of this further. If this is confirmed, it would wish the Council to have discussions over whether Neighbourhood Action Groups could be reinstated in priority areas.

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<sup>3</sup> The relevant discussion was held with the sergeant in charge of the PCSOs covering the northern half of the city.

***Recommendation 18: That the Council holds discussions with Thames Valley Police to determine whether additional resources for community policing have become available, and to propose reinstating Neighbourhood Action Groups or similar ward-based stakeholder meetings in priority areas if so.***

44. A further issue explored by the Panel was that of links between the Police and the new locality-based way of working by the Council. Feedback provided was that the Police were happy to engage with the Council on joint-working, but would be coming on board in the second stage, once the Council had established its locality-based working more fully. When this is up and running, the Panel sees strong opportunity for tenants to be able to raise ASB-related concerns at this locality level, and encourages the Council to do as much preparatory work as possible to allow this to be established at the earliest opportunity.

***Recommendation 19: That the Council undertakes preparatory work with the Police to enable joint-working at a locality level to be established as quickly as possible.***

## Chapter 3: Conclusion

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45. A key ongoing theme throughout this mini-review has been the importance staff place upon and commitment to achieving strong levels of tenant involvement, and the appreciation of tenant ambassadors of the efforts made by the Council to empower them. There is clear goodwill by staff and tenants to work together to improve the Council's service to tenants. It should not be forgotten that the Council is an award-winning Council in this regard. On the other hand, true joint working must involve honest listening and the results of the STAR tenant satisfaction survey were clear in that there are certain elements of the Council's offer, and certain groups of tenants, for whom levels of satisfaction are not as high as either party would wish. Key issues highlighted to the Council include the satisfaction with homes amongst younger tenants, concerns that the Council does not listen and act upon what is heard, and dissatisfaction with how ASB issues are resolved.
46. As the Council emerges from Covid, its direction of travel is not simply a return to the *status quo ante*. The success of locality based working during the pandemic has been a driver for internal restructuring, whilst from outside the Council central government's Social Housing white paper has put a large number of new responsibilities on all providers of social housing, including many steps which empower tenants. Consequently, the Housing function faces very significant change. The Panel has considered the Council's plans overall, but also specifically through the lens of tenant involvement and empowerment. Largely, the Panel finds that the Council's proposals are to be commended, with the Panel's recommendations largely seeking that existing plans are brought forward or that clarification is given of how existing work is undertaken. Only in one instance, the right of tenants to challenge spend, has a genuine mismatch between the Council's proposals and the Panel's interpretation of the Council's duties been identified. This reflects the Panel's view that overall, the Council is pushing off from a solid foundation.
47. A final word from the Panel is this. With a report such as this it is easy to focus on the recommendations made, putting them into practice and ticking them off as 'done'. Whilst the Panel stands by all the recommendations it has made, it wishes to stress the point made at the very beginning of this report – that the very purpose of the Council retaining its social housing is to have the ability to outperform other providers. Our tenants have told us that one of the deficiencies in our service relates to how much the Council listens to and acts on concerns. The Panel's recommendations largely are ways to address this issue. However, they are only suggested responses and are not the only template to do so. More than the individual recommendations themselves, the Panel wishes to commend to the Council the need to continue building on steps it has taken to date to involve and empower tenants. If the Council can really embed an approach where tenant involvement and empowerment is a lodestar, a question which is asked at every level and with every decision, the Council's ambition to provide better housing to its tenants than alternative providers will be realised.

**To:** Housing and Homelessness Panel  
**Date:** 16 December 2021  
**Report of:** Head of Housing Services  
**Title of Report:** Tenant and leaseholder satisfaction survey 2021

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of Report:</b>	To update the Housing and Homelessness Panel on the results of the Tenant and Leaseholder Satisfaction Survey 2021 and to provide an overview of planned improvements
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Deliver more affordable housing, Support thriving communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Corporate Plan
<b>Recommendation: That the Panel resolves to:</b>	
1. Note the report having agreed any recommendations to Cabinet arising from it.	

<b>Appendices</b>	
Appendix A:	About STAR
Appendix B:	Full Survey Reports
Appendix C:	Resident Suggestions for Improvement

## **Background**

1. The Council, in common with other social housing landlords, carry out periodic surveys of tenants and leaseholders on how satisfied they are with the services provided which is then used to inform service improvement plans. The survey is commonly known as a STAR survey.
2. Following a procurement process that involved resident ambassadors evaluating tender submissions, Acuity Research and Practice were appointed to carry out the 2021 STAR survey with an option to extend the contract for up to a further three years. *See Appendix A for more information about previous surveys and STAR methodology.*
3. Given the length of time since the previous survey in 2015, it was agreed that a census of all tenants and leaseholders would take place, rather than a sample as before, such that a new baseline can be established. All tenants and leaseholders were invited to take part in the survey by post or online, in addition 925 tenants were telephoned. The survey ran from mid-May and closed on 5 July 2021. A total of 1,579 tenants (23%) and 84 leaseholders (12%) responded. A number of the questions from 2015 were included, together with new questions.

## Key results

4. The survey provides the Council with important baseline data, with the most positive feedback from tenants as follows:
  - 85% are satisfied with our customer service (new question)
  - 81% believe their rent is value for money (75% in 2015)
  - 80% feel safe and secure in their home (new question)
  - 76% are satisfied with the Council as a landlord (83% in 2015)
  - 76% are satisfied with the repairs service (77% in 2015)
  - 76% are satisfied with being kept informed about things that may affect them (74% in 2015)
5. While solid, the results are in the main not as strong as those in 2015, however they should be viewed against a backdrop of more than a year of COVID-19 related service restrictions, where for many months all non-emergency repairs and planned improvements were paused and significant backlogs occurred. Other visible services such as caretaking and cleaning were also impacted, as were face to face services previously provided by the Council.
6. The STAR survey compares favourably with LGA polling on nearly all metrics, most notably value for money – with 81% of Oxford council tenants agreeing that they get value for money, against 43% nationally. Oxford also scores higher than the national average on how the Council runs things, being kept well informed, trust and acting on concerns.
7. Societally, the six years since the last STAR survey have been disruptive and polarising, and the impact of this on people’s satisfaction with their lives cannot be discounted, even if it cannot be disentangled. The Local Government Association (LGA) measures resident satisfaction with their councils every four months, and the October 2021 survey reports that only 56% of people are satisfied or very satisfied with how their local council runs things – the lowest level since polling began in 2012.
8. This is context, not excuses. Whatever the reasons, the overall trend since 2015 is in the main downwards. Oxford is not alone in this.
9. What is important is that the STAR survey provides the Council with a baseline for improvement and that work is already underway to address this. The most significant areas we need to address are:
  - overall satisfaction with the Council as a landlord (down 7%)
  - overall satisfaction with the quality of the home (down 12% to 67%)
  - tenants’ views are listened to and acted upon (down 5% to 55%)
  - satisfaction with the outcome of an antisocial behaviour (ASB) complaint (down 11% to 49%)

*The full breakdown of STAR survey results is provided in Appendix B.*

10. In the next four years the Council plans to invest £51m in planned maintenance, refurbishments and estate improvements and a further £8.7m in improving energy efficiency in existing council homes.

11. Together with the ongoing delivery of a new generation of high quality, design-led and low carbon council homes by Oxford City Housing Ltd (OCHL), this should help to improve tenant satisfaction in the coming years.
12. The improvement plan and work identified and underway are considered in more detail below.

### **Resident comments and suggestions for improvement**

13. The survey provided an option for tenants and leaseholders to comment on service areas and areas for improvement. Overall, 1,683 comments were provided by tenants and 98 comments were provided by leaseholders. The survey also asked respondents who were dissatisfied to indicate the reason for their dissatisfaction across a range of issues. Combined with the comments, this has provided an invaluable insight into how services can be improved and importantly where we need to concentrate our efforts.
14. Comments and suggestions have been shared with relevant teams responsible for specific services, who have been putting in place a range of initiatives and action plans to help drive improvement. It is also worth noting that 373 comments made were positive ones.
15. The Tenant Involvement Team have also been contacting customers who indicated that they wanted to be involved in developing and improving services and these are adding to the growing ranks of resident ambassadors.
16. The Tenant Involvement Team have been making contact with dissatisfied respondents willing to be contacted about their responses, in order to see:
  - whether or not the issue has now been fully resolved
  - what sits behind their comments – is it a systemic problem or a single failure?
17. The learnings from these contacts will feed into service improvement plans. Not unsurprisingly, the three most commented on areas were:
  - the repairs service
  - customer care/service
  - communications and information

*A full breakdown of residents' suggestions for improvement is provided in Appendix C.*

## Improvement planning

18. Taking a whole Council approach key work streams have already been put in train as part of establishing an overall comprehensive improvement plan. Key headlines and work already underway are included in the sections below. Progress against the plan will be presented to the portfolio holder and February Housing Panel with regular updates provided to subsequent meetings.

## Repairs service

19. Across all social landlords, the biggest driver for tenant dissatisfaction is the day to day repairs service and 20% of the suggestions for improvements relate to repairs.

20. A range of measures have been or are being put in place by ODS to improve satisfaction with repairs. These include:

- SMS messages to cover the confirmation of appointments, day before reminders, operative on the way notifications and post-work satisfaction surveys
- live dashboards to deal immediately with less than satisfactory customer responses
- use of DRS (dynamic resource scheduling) for operatives to improve responsiveness to customers
- Grafton stock contract with on demand stock deliveries for fixed right first time repairs
- use of QL First Touch solution enables operatives to book follow up calls with customers whilst on site
- the QL Portal when implemented will enable tenants to report, view and track repairs
- proactive programme to revisit cases where damp and mould have been reported in the past to review whether measures taken have worked or not
- trialling IoT (internet of things) monitoring with smart sensors to measure humidity and temperature in homes
- customer care training for all staff centred on communication, behaviours and delivering a right first time service

21. ODS is implementing a new customer services strategy, encompassing customer experience, journey mapping, sentiment and real time transactional performance management. This will provide insight into training and development needs and opportunities for ODS staff. ODS colleagues are working with Tenant Involvement and resident ambassadors to develop the survey questions and using customer feedback to learn what is important and what needs to change.

## **Quality of the home and the neighbourhood – planned maintenance**

22. Although the Council has maintained its homes to the Decent Homes standard, a significantly increased £51m investment programme has been included in the HRA business plan as part of the next four year medium term financial plan.
23. These programmes are targeted to accelerate the replacement of key asset management items, namely:
- doors and windows
  - re-roofing
  - structural repairs
  - lifts and door phone entry systems
  - cyclical repairs and decoration
  - internal communal area improvements
24. Investment continues to be made through the Great Estates programme for flat block improvements and parking. The expectations set out in the social housing White Paper are that the Decent Homes standard will be extended to include external communal areas of blocks and the overall condition of the wider estates.
25. There is however still a lower level of satisfaction with the condition of the home and the draft budget includes provision for a full stock condition survey to assess what work is needed over and above Decent Homes in future. The current void property re-let standard is also being reviewed.
26. An £8.7m investment programme to improve the energy efficiency of homes and reduce carbon is already underway.

## **Communications and engagement**

27. There are a number of emerging areas where increasing the effectiveness of engagement with tenants is vital, including:
- building safety
  - personal fire safety
  - the carbon reduction agenda
  - digital channel shift
  - the need to capture accurately tenants' personal data, contact details, data preferences and protected characteristic information so that reasonable adjustments to services can be made where necessary.
28. There is a clear message that a significant proportion of tenants who do not consider that their views are being listened to and acted upon. Listening and engaging with tenants on an individual basis is a key feature of the social housing White Paper and will be a key theme under the new regulatory regime.

29. While as a proportion they are much smaller in number, tenants aged under 25 are significantly less satisfied than older tenants – particularly those aged over 60. Improving our digital offer will be vital in delivering improved communications to and engagement with younger age groups.
30. The draft budget contains proposals to provide the organisation capacity to carry out this important engagement activity and reconnect with our tenants to find out their views and what is important to them. Assuming the budget is approved, home visits will be carried out during 2022 and 2023. A multi-layered targeted approach is being worked on which will need to cater for:
- a concentration on those vulnerable households where tenancy sustainment is an issue
  - those where there are fire and other health and safety considerations
  - engagement with our carbon reduction planning, which will be driven by property type data
  - engagement with the age group with lowest satisfaction levels to better understand their needs and expectations
31. A communications and engagement campaign has been devised to support the decarbonisation agenda and the retrofitting of council homes with energy efficient improvements. This campaign is complimentary to the engagement activity generally.
32. There are a growing number of resident ambassadors, both tenants and leaseholders. Work is underway with them to set up a broad group of advocates/champions and assist with engagement activities, promoting the benefits of effective engagement.

### **Antisocial behaviour**

33. Satisfaction with antisocial behaviour and the outcomes is typically low. Often, the victim wants far more draconian and punitive sanctions put in place to deal with a perpetrator rather than the behaviours simply stopping. While the number of tenant interactions with the ASB service is low when compared to other main services, the satisfaction level with case work outcome is low.
34. The Community Safety service is giving consideration to how to carry out case reviews with those respondents who indicated that they were unhappy with how various elements of their cases were handled and will be contacting those tenants to find out how the service can be improved.
35. The Council has also recently agreed an updated antisocial behaviour policy which focuses on the support and protection of victims of antisocial behaviour and has a positive impact on people with protected characteristics. For those suspected of causing antisocial behaviour, mental health is often a feature and the revised policy requires that officers identify support needs of perpetrators and work with them to engage with support organisations.

### **Service Integration Project**

36. The service integration project linking Housing, Communities and Community Safety aims to further improve how we bring our teams, our customers and our partners together to deliver joined up services to residents of Oxford, including our tenants.
37. The main objective is to create locality teams made up of people from relevant services, who will work closely with our communities and partners to deliver cross-team solutions for customers in need.
38. Through two pilot areas at Barton and Blackbird Leys, staff have been testing a number of approaches to more collaborative work with:
- multi-team locality working and case management
  - a more co-ordinated pathway for customers with a number of different needs
  - working more closely with partners to find community solutions
  - training and knowledge sharing within multi-disciplinary teams

### **Customer experience change programme**

39. The Council's corporate change programme is centred on how we deliver more streamlined and effective services to customers overall. This will include improved use of technology and efficient self-serve, releasing specialist resources for more preventative work and support for those customers in greatest need at a local level.
40. The new QL IT system presents a significant opportunity for greater efficiency and enhanced customer service.
41. A range of teams across the Council have interactions with our tenants and leaseholders, with ODS, the contact centre and the Incomes Team (rents) having the most contact. Planned improvements to our customer journey will have maximum impact on satisfaction levels.

### **Service delivery review**

42. Although not featuring heavily in the STAR survey, frontline housing management services have been under pressure for a significant period, including Tenancy Management, Tenancy Sustainment and Allocations. This has impacted on case work resources. Additional resources are planned for this area of activity.
43. Our services to tenants and leaseholders are provided by a range of teams across the council and providing a seamless service presents a challenge. The new council structure and the service integration project presents an opportunity to deliver improvement to meet this challenge.
44. An external review of how the council delivers its services to tenants as a landlord has been commissioned to inform our thinking.

### **Survey results publication**

45. The full report will be published on the council's website in December 2021, in parallel with this summary report being considered by Housing Panel on 16 December 2021.

## Conclusion

46. Overall, most tenants and leaseholders are satisfied or very satisfied with the customer service they receive. More than four fifths (81%) of tenants perceive the rent they pay to be good value for money, and this supports the case for social housing contained in the OCHL development programme and other affordable housing schemes.
47. While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a backdrop of increased dissatisfaction with council services nationwide cloud the picture somewhat, the survey results provide a sound evidence base and a starting point for improvement in a post-lockdown world.
48. Nevertheless there are a number of clear areas for improvement. Taking a whole council approach, Landlord Services is working with ODS and relevant service teams to identify and deliver the necessary improvement plans.
49. Crucially, these will be underpinned by the £51m of planned maintenance, refurbishments and estate improvements and a further £8.7m in improving energy efficiency in existing council homes over the next four years, together with the ongoing delivery of a new generation of high quality, design-led and low carbon council homes by OCHL.

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## Appendix A – About STAR

The STAR acronym stands for Survey of Tenants and Residents, and it is a framework designed for social landlords to collect tenant and resident satisfaction feedback in a consistent, measurable way. Introduced in 2011, STAR surveys were developed by Housemark, the housing benchmarking organisation, in conjunction with a number of industry bodies and tenant groups.

Although generally carried out every three years by landlords, Oxford City Council carried out STAR surveys each year from 2012 to 2015, at which point, with dwindling response levels reducing to 17% it was decided to extend the period between surveys.

It was planned to restart the survey in 2018. However, Housemark announced that it was overhauling the STAR survey methodology and question base to include transactional as well as perception based questions and to include a greater focus on safety, the home and the estate. This is in line with the themes introduced in the social housing Green Paper – A New Deal for Social Housing.

As a result, the council decided to wait until the revised measures were published rather than spending money on a survey which would have limited use in terms of comparability. Housemark's revised measures were finally published in February 2020. It was then not considered appropriate to carry out the survey in 2020 given the overriding need to respond to the COVID-19 emergency.

The decision to proceed with the survey in 2021 was made in recognition that the social housing White Paper, published in November 2020, set out a series of landlord performance and satisfaction indicators that were to be consulted on and that landlords would be expected to measure and publish.

### **Benchmarking**

STAR survey results would ordinarily be initially compared with the sector as a whole and then peer groups of stock holding local authorities with similar numbers of properties and challenges. As few, if any, landlords would have carried out a STAR survey in 2020, the only data comparisons that could be made would be against surveys carried out before the COVID-19 pandemic. This would not provide a meaningful comparison. Many councils have also moved away from annual surveys, but this is likely to change as the new regulatory inspection regime comes in.

## Appendix B – Full survey results

The percentages shown below relate to “satisfied” and “very satisfied” responses and do not include “neither”, “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Question theme	2021	2015*
Overall satisfaction with the council as a landlord	76%	83%
Overall quality of the home	67%	79%
Condition of home	66%	
Safe and secure home	80%	
Communal areas safe and clean	75%	
Value for money (rent)	81%	75%
Value for money (service charges)	68%	
Neighbourhood as a place to live	75%	
Overall appearance of the neighbourhood	73%	
Overall repairs and maintenance service	76%	77%
Repairs right first time	76%	
Last repair carried out	79%	
OCC is easy to deal with	77%	
Customer service they receive	85%	
Being kept informed about things that might affect them	76%	74%
Having a say in how services are managed	63%	
Tenants views being listened to and acted upon	55%	60%
Support received when dealing with ASB case	53%	
Speed of the ASB case	53%	
Final outcome of the ASB case	49%	60%
The way a complaint was handled	49%	
The final outcome of a complaint	33%	

\* 2015 figures shown where available

Perception of neighbourhood over the last three years		
Got better	Stayed the same	Got worse
17%	60%	23%

### Perceptions

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
OCC takes health and safety concerns seriously	69%	19%	12%
OCC treats tenants fairly	73%	17%	10%
OCC is open and transparent	63%	24%	13%
OCC cares about their customers	66%	20%	14%
OCC has friendly and approachable staff	81%	13%	6%
OCC keeps its promises	56%	25%	19%
I feel valued by OCC	58%	23%	20%
OCC treats me with respect	73%	17%	10%
I trust OCC	66%	19%	15%

### Demographics

	Age		
	Under 25	25 - 59	60+
Overall satisfaction	58%	70%	85%
Quality of home	42%	57%	81%
Repairs and maintenance	63%	71%	84%

### Leaseholder results

Leaseholders were not surveyed in previous STAR surveys.

The percentages shown below relate to “satisfied” and “very satisfied” responses and do not include “neither”, “dissatisfied” or “very dissatisfied”.

Question theme	2021
Overall satisfaction with the council as a landlord	33%
Overall quality of the home	60%
Condition of home	52%
Safe and secure home	58%
Communal areas safe and clean	42%
Value for money (rent)	64%
Value for money (service charges)	22%
Neighbourhood as a place to live	58%
Overall appearance of the neighbourhood	39%
Overall repairs and maintenance service	34%
Repairs right first time	31%
Last repair carried out	37%
OCC is easy to deal with	35%
Customer service they receive	43%
Being kept informed about things that might affect them	53%
Having a say in how services are managed	33%
Tenants views being listened to and acted upon	24%
Support received when dealing with ASB case	24%
Speed of the ASB case	18%
Final outcome of the ASB case	23%
The way a complaint was handled	23%
The final outcome of a complaint	23%

Perception of neighbourhood over the last three years		
Got better	Stayed the same	Got worse
14%	56%	30%

### Perceptions

	Agree	Neither	Disagree
OCC takes health and safety concerns seriously	35%	38%	27%
OCC treats tenants fairly	32%	32%	37%
OCC is open and transparent	42%	26%	42%
OCC cares about their customers	32%	24%	45%

	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disagree</b>
OCC has friendly and approachable staff	53%	25%	22%
OCC keeps its promises	47%	27%	47%
I feel valued by OCC	22%	26%	51%
OCC treats me with respect	43%	27%	31%
I trust OCC	45%	18%	45%

**Appendix C – Resident suggestions for improvement**

<b>Positive comments</b>	<b>22% of total</b>
Generally happy, no problems	278
Repairs service/workforce	26
Attitude of staff	25
Good communications and contactable	11
Good overall service	9
Happy living here	6
Settled, lived here a long time	5
Like my home (type, size, condition)	4
Neighbourhood/good location	4
Communal cleaning & maintenance	3
Feel safe and secure	1
Good value for money	1

<b>Day-to-day repairs</b>	<b>20% of total</b>
Repairs service generally	79
Timescales to complete repairs	55
Appointments	54
Quality of work	37
Outstanding / forgotten repairs	28
Communication about repair (before work started)	14
Quality checking	13
Treatment of resident / home	13
Ease of reporting repair	7
Keep informed of repair progress	6
Right first time	6
Repairs covered in service level	6
Contractor	5
Internal communications (repairs)	3
Job details given to contractor	3
Replace not repair	1
Out of hours service	1

<b>Customer contact</b>	<b>11% of total</b>
Customer care, customer service	70
Return call / email	26
Keep promises	14
Staff knowledge / turnover	13
Time taken to resolve enquiry	11
Resolving problems	11
Answering phones	11
Call handling	10
Contact information	7
Keep informed of progress	6
Complaints handling	6
Automated system	5
Internal communications	2
Opening hours	1

<b>Communications and information</b>	<b>10% of total</b>
Communications (in general)	59
Listen carefully, take interest	39
Keep tenants up to date	15
More visits	13
Website and online services	11
Act on views and give feedback	10
Transparent in decision-making	7
Consult or inform before acting	4
Information on service standards	3
More events, meetings	3

<b>Grounds maintenance</b>	<b>5% of total</b>
Grounds maintenance generally	25
Grass cutting	14
Fences and gates	11
Bushes & hedges - maintenance / weeding	8
Tree maintenance	7
Rubbish	5
Paths and driveways	4
Drainage/flooding issues	2
Flower beds - maintenance / weeding	2
Overgrown/neglected gardens	1
Landscaping	1
Removal of garden waste	1

<b>Neighbourhood problems</b>	<b>4% of total</b>
Car parking, signage and garage areas	23
Anti-social behaviour (dealing with)	16
Drug related issues	9
Neighbours - noise, alcohol	8
Neighbours gardens	4
Litter, graffiti and vandalism	3
Pest/vermin issues	3
Noise from children, ball games	2
Dogs - noise or fouling	1

<b>Property condition</b>	<b>4% of total</b>
Damp / mould / condensation	16
Regular inspections	13
External property maintenance	13
Condition of the property	12
Condition of property at letting	5
Flooring	3
Insulation	2
Sound proofing	1
Pest/vermin control	1

<b>Tenant services and management</b>	<b>3% of total</b>
Help for older residents/health issues	21
Value for money (rent/service charge)	9
Move, transfer	8
Decorating /handyman service	5
Financial difficulties	5
Enforcement of tenancy agreement	4
Warden service	2
Purchase property	1
Overcrowding	1
Rent issues, arrears, HB	1

<b>Home improvements</b>	<b>3% of total</b>
General home improvements	14
Property adaptations	14
New kitchen, bathroom	9
New doors or windows	7
Heating system	3

<b>Safety and security</b>	<b>2% of total</b>
Health & safety (general)	10
Security measures (general)	5
CCTV/cameras needed	4
Fire alarm information or testing	2
Lighting (car park, communal)	2
People on site not residents	1
Do not feel safe	1
Door or window security	1
Door security in communal areas	1
Property theft (parcels)	1
Asbestos	1

<b>Communal areas</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Rubbish	7
Frequency of cleaning service	6
Rubbish storage areas	3
Maintenance of communal areas	2
Storage areas - mobility scooter, bikes	2
Lifts	1
Caretaker customer service	1

<b>Council, other agencies</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Council refuse collection	8
Fly-tipping	4
Road repairs	3
Traffic - speed or noise	3
Lighting, street lighting	2

<b>Organisational policies</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Energy efficient, environmentally friendly	8
Too financially focused	2
Mix of tenants or tenures	2
Service generally / declined	1
Bedroom tax	1
Build more homes	1
Senior Management	1

<b>Moving</b>	<b>1% of total</b>
Need larger property	6
Health issues require a move	4
Need a smaller property	1
Do not like the neighbourhood, move to better area	1
Move away from neighbours, noisy	1

<b>Local area services</b>	<b>0% of total</b>
Local transport	3
Youth facilities/centres	2
Play areas for children	1
Local facilities (shops etc.)	1

<b>Other</b>	<b>12% of total</b>
No comment/suggestions	142
Other	26
Don't know	14
General negative comment	8
Neutral comment	4
Already commented in earlier question	1

## Appendix A - STAR survey action plan 2022

Action	Action owner	Milestones	Key Dates/Timescales
<b>1.0 - Repairs service</b>			
1.1 – Bring in SMS messages for repairs to cover the confirmation of appointments, day before reminders, operative on the way notifications and post-work satisfaction surveys.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	SMS messaging system for appointments in place.	31/07/2022 (provisional)
1.2 – Creation of live dashboards so ODS can deal immediately with less than satisfactory customer responses.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	Dashboards scoped and designed.  Dashboard constructed in Power Bi following rollout of SMS messaging system for appointments.	Completed  30/11/2022 (provisional)
1.3 - Full rollout of DRS (dynamic resource scheduling) for operatives to improve responsiveness to customers.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	DRS (dynamic resource scheduling) deployed for 50% of operatives in ODS.  DRS (dynamic resource scheduling) deployed for 100% of operatives in ODS.	Completed  31/07/2022 (provisional)
1.4 - Grafton stock contract with on demand stock deliveries for fixed right first time repairs.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	Van stocks deployed and just in time delivery service up and running.	Completed
1.5 - Use of QL First Touch solution to enable operatives to book follow up calls with customers whilst on site.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	QL First Touch solution deployed for 50% of operatives in ODS.  QL First Touch solution deployed for 100% of operatives in ODS.	Completed  31/07/2022 (provisional)

1.6 - Implement the QL Portal to enable tenants to report, view and track repairs.	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	Deployment of customer portal (Rents, Repairs, Choice Based Lettings)	31/10/2022 (provisional)
1.7 – Carry out a proactive programme to revisit cases where damp and mould have been reported in the past to review whether measures taken have worked or not.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	All mould and damp works prioritised when identified.  All cases in last 2 years contacted to see if there are any ongoing issues.  A mould and condensation prevention video launched and linked to OCC website.	Ongoing  Completed  Completed
1.8 - Customer care training for all staff in ODS centred on communication, behaviours and delivering a right first time service.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	EDI training for all staff  Customer care training developed. Training rolled out to all ODS staff.	Completed  Ongoing (linked to timescales on text survey and dashboards)
1.9 - Develop a new ODS Customer Service Strategy, encompassing customer experience, journey mapping, sentiment and real time transactional performance management.	Paul Concannon, ODS Director of Property Services	Project Manager appointed.  Customer Service Strategy in place.	01/04/2022  31/03/2023
<b>2.0 - Quality of the home and the neighbourhood – planned maintenance</b>			
2.1 - Deliver £51m HRA investment programme to accelerate the replacement of key asset management items (pending approval of council budget).	Mark Smart, HRA Surveying Manager	<u>See capital spend budget below action plan for details</u> Investment programmes delivered including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• doors and windows</li> <li>• re-roofing</li> <li>• structural repairs</li> <li>• lifts and door phone entry systems</li> <li>• cyclical repairs and decoration</li> <li>• internal communal area improvements</li> </ul>	2026 (in line with yearly budget profile)

<p>2.2 - Carry out a full stock condition survey of council homes to assess what work is needed over and above Decent Homes in future (pending approval of budget).</p>	<p>Mark Smart, HRA Surveying Manager</p>	<p>Data set for collection selected and tender prepared and tenders invited.</p> <p>Survey contractor appointed.</p> <p>Stock survey completed. Develop a 5 year rolling programme informed by the results of the stock condition survey as they become available.</p>	<p>March 2022</p> <p>30/04/2022</p> <p>31/03/2024</p>
<p>2.3 - Continue to invest through the Great Estates programme for flat block improvements and parking, including £1.1m in 22-23. (The Great Estates budget is dedicated to low rise building communal spaces, improvements in security/lighting/entrance doors and access to a useable green space.)</p> <p>Barns Road Before</p>  <p>Barns Road After</p> 	<p>Sue Briscoe, Great Estates Senior Surveyor</p>	<p>2021/22 programme completed.</p> <p>Sites for 2022/23 programme selected and programme commenced.</p> <p><i>See below for budget numbers</i></p>	<p>31/01/2022</p> <p>01/03/2022</p>

3.0 Communications and engagement			
<p>3.1 – Increase the resourcing of tenant engagement activity (subject to budget approval), in order to develop and rollout a tenant engagement campaign, which will include areas such as –</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• building safety</li> <li>• personal fire safety</li> <li>• carbon reduction programme (further detail 3.4)</li> <li>• digital channel shift</li> </ul>	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	Recruitment of new Customer Experience team to develop and deliver engagement plan	30/06/2022  31/03/2024
<p>3.2 – Take further steps to better understand our tenants, with more accurate capture of tenants' personal data, contact details, data preferences and protected characteristic information.</p>	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	QL First Touch forms implemented.  QL customer portal launched	30/06/2022  31/03/2024
<p>3.3 – Further improve our digital offer to deliver improved communications and engagements to tenants who prefer digital means of communications, such as younger people.</p>	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	Development and rollout of engagement plan  QL customer portal launched	30/06/2022  31/03/2024
<p>3.4 - Launch a specific communications and engagement campaign to support the decarbonisation and retrofitting of council homes with energy efficient improvements.</p>	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <u>Phase one:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Use advertising and editorial to encourage tenants to look out for a letter from the council.</li> <li>- Initiate a programme to collect fully permissioned email addresses for all council tenants.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Phase two:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Send a letter to all homes affected</li> <li>- Tenant Involvement wider activity</li> </ul> </li> <li>• <u>Phase three:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Send a letter to all homes that have not yet signed up, with instructions on how they can arrange a 1-2-1 with a Tenant Advocate/Champion.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	30/06/2022  31/03/2024

		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Decarb training to the registered Tenant Advocates/Champions.</li> <li>- Digital media</li> <li>- 1-2-1 sessions with undecided tenants via a zoom calls, or non-digital alternatives.</li> <li>• <u>Phase four:</u> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Build the wider engagement team. Identify programme – advice, signposting, dropping leaflet etc.</li> </ul> </li> </ul>	
<b>4.0 - Antisocial behaviour</b>			
4.1 – Community Safety and Tenant Involvement to work together to carry out engagement work with tenants about ASB to better understand the feedback from the Tenant Survey and identify any improvements.	Liz Jones, ASBIT Manager	<p>Complete a programme of engagement with tenants on the subject of ASB</p> <p>Agree any changes in the Community Safety team from the learning and feedback</p>	<p>31/07/2022</p> <p>30/09/2022</p>
4.2 – Improve the Council's online ASB offering, with more information on support available and on what services the Council can provide.	Liz Jones, ASBIT Manager	Go live of new web pages	31/07/2022
4.3 - Implement the updated antisocial behaviour policy (November 2021) which focuses on the support and protection of victims of antisocial behaviour and has a positive impact on people with protected characteristics. For those suspected of causing antisocial behaviour, mental health is often a feature and the revised policy requires that officers identify where possible support needs of perpetrators and seek to address them in partnership with third sector and statutory partners.	Liz Jones, ASBIT Manager	Implement the policy in full	Ongoing

<b>5.0 Housing Services</b>			
5.1 - Deliver the service integration project, linking Housing, Communities and Community Safety functions, aiming to further improve how we bring our teams, our customers and our partners together to deliver joined up services to residents of Oxford, including our tenants. This includes the objective to create locality teams made up of people from relevant services, who will work closely with our communities and partners to deliver cross-team solutions for customers in need.	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services	Complete and report on the locality based pilots  Deliver the overall SIP project	31/03/2022  31/03/2023
5.2 - Recruit additional resources for frontline housing management services, including Tenancy Management and Allocations to improve case work (subject to budget approval)	Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager	Recruitment of new posts	30/04/2022  30/06/2022
5.3 - Commission an external review of how the council delivers its services to tenants as a landlord to inform our thinking.	Stephen Clarke, Head of Housing Services	Instruct an external consultant  Receive report	28/02/2022  30/05/2022



Structural	2,000,000	1,750,000	1,000,000	700,000	
Controlled entry	133,000	133,000	133,000	133,000	
Damp-proof works (K&B)	75,000	75,000	137,000	121,000	
Doors and Windows	500,000	500,000	500,000	200,000	
Extensions & Major Adaptions	735,000	290,000	290,000	250,000	
Communal Areas	213,000	229,000	229,000	202,000	
Lift replacements	125,000	125,000	125,000	125,000	
Stock condition survey	195,000	195,000			
Renewal Fire Alarm Panels	102,000	102,000	102,000	102,000	
	<b>4,078,000</b>	<b>3,399,000</b>	<b>2,516,000</b>	<b>1,833,000</b>	<b>11,826,000</b>
<b>Regulatory</b>					
Kitchens & Bathrooms	1,300,000	1,450,000	3,055,000	2,739,000	
Heating	2,352,000	2,393,000	2,393,000	2,157,000	
Roofing	700,000	700,000	700,000	229,000	
Electrics	695,000	723,000	723,000	723,000	
Fire doors	1,500,000	580,000	580,000	580,000	
	<b>6,547,000</b>	<b>5,846,000</b>	<b>7,451,000</b>	<b>6,428,000</b>	<b>26,272,000</b>
<b>Empty Properties</b>					
Major Voids	515,000	560,000	560,000	502,000	<b>2,137,000</b>
<b>Energy Efficiency Initiatives</b>					
Energy Efficiency Initiatives	1,985,000	2,000,000	2,000,000	2,750,000	<b>8,735,000</b>
<b>TOTAL</b>					<b>51,994,000</b>

<b>Estate Improvement</b>	<b>2022-23</b>	<b>2023-24</b>	<b>2024-25</b>	<b>2025-26</b>	<b>Total</b>
Great Estates: Estate Enhancements and Regeneration	1,109,000	1,163,000	1,163,000	1,163,000	4,598,000
Barton Regeneration					0
BBL Regeneration	325,000	1,504,000	1,504,000	172,000	3,505,000
Major Refurbishment Masons Road	750,000	250,000			1,000,000
	<b>2,184,000</b>	<b>2,917,000</b>	<b>2,667,000</b>	<b>1,335,000</b>	<b>9,103,000</b>



Housing and Homelessness Panel  
(Panel of the Scrutiny Committee)

45

Social Housing White Paper:  
The Charter for Social Housing Residents

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager  
06/10/2021

# Introduction

- Grenfell Tower tragedy led government to focus on tenants and safety
- Countrywide roadshows and wide consultations with tenants
- Social Housing Green Paper 2018
- Call for Evidence on how social housing is regulated
- <sup>70</sup> MHCLG published the Social Housing White Paper in November 2020, entitled The Charter for Social Housing Residents (The Charter)
- Linked to and heavily referencing Building Safety Bill and Fire Safety Bill
- Will be driven by legislation and regulation
- Clear expectation that landlords should not wait

# Seven Themed Chapters

- To be safe in your home
- To know how your landlord is performing
- To have your complaints dealt with promptly and fairly
- To be treated with respect
- To have your voice heard by your landlord
- To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in
- To be supported to take your first step to ownership

# Chapter 1: To be Safe in Your Home 1

- Building Safety Bill - enhanced regulatory regime for all buildings, including a more stringent regime for the design, construction, day-to-day management and maintenance of higher-risk buildings, with residents having a strong voice in the system.
- Fire Safety Consultation on Government proposals to implement the recommendations in the Grenfell Tower Inquiry's Phase 1 report
- Supported a Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group, bringing together social landlords and residents from across the country to test approaches to engagement on building safety.
- Published a Fire Safety Bill which will clarify the scope of the Fire Safety Order in its application to the structure, external walls and flat entrance doors in multi-occupied residential buildings.

# Chapter 1: To be Safe in Your Home 2

- Strengthening the RSH's consumer regulation objectives to explicitly include safety.
- Requiring social landlords to identify a nominated person responsible for complying with their health and safety requirements.
- Regulator of Social Housing work with HSE to ensure effective sharing of information with the Building Safety Regulator.
- Consult on requiring smoke alarms in social housing and introducing new expectations for carbon monoxide alarms (now complete).
- Consult on measures to ensure that social housing residents are protected from harm caused by poor electrical safety.
- Continue to work with the Social Sector (Building Safety) Engagement Best Practice Group and the Building Safety Regulator to ensure resident voices are heard.

# Chapter 1: To be Safe in Your Home 3

- Engagement on safety
- Building Safety Manager for high rise and named Accountable Person
- Two-way engagement with residents on how safety is managed
- Residents automatically receive information about the fire and structural protections in place to manage risks within their building
- Residents have access to a quick and effective route to raise complaints about fire and structural safety
- Residents have information to enable them to understand and fulfil their safety responsibilities
- Personal Emergency Evacuation Plan (PEEPs)

# Chapter 1: To be Safe in Your Home - Impacts

- Unprecedented consultation and ongoing engagement
- Different from “Resident Involvement”
- New areas of work
- Provision of information
- Resident safety comes first
- Staffing resource required
- Housing Revenue Account needs to provide the resource to deliver

# Chapter 2: Know how your landlord is performing 1

- Tenants need to be able to hold their landlords to account
- RSH to bring in a set of tenant satisfaction measures for all landlords on things that matter to tenants – consultation already underway.
- A new access to information scheme for social housing tenants of providers so that information relating to landlords is easily accessible by tenants.
- Landlords required to provide complete transparency in publishing and reporting expenditure including levels of executive remuneration.
- Information to be in an accessible format so tenants can see how funds are being spent
- Tenants able to challenge whether money is being spent on the things that matter to them
- Landlords required to identify a senior person in their organisation who is responsible for ensuring they comply with the consumer standards set by the Regulator of Social Housing.
- Landlords to report to every tenant on such matters at least once a year, if not continuously, using technology.

# Chapter 2: Know how your landlord is performing 2

## Draft Performance Measures

- Decent Homes Standard compliance
- Responsive repairs completed right first time
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord's repairs and maintenance service
- 🔊 Compliance with health and safety obligations:
  - Gas safety
  - Electrical safety
  - Fire safety
  - Asbestos
  - Water safety
  - Lift safety
- Tenant satisfaction with the health and safety of their home

# Chapter 2: Know how your landlord is performing 3

## Draft Performance Measures

- Number of complaints relative to the size of the landlord
- % of complaints resolved within agreed timescale
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord's complaints handling
- Number of complaints relating to fairness and/or respect, relative to the size of the landlord
- Tenant satisfaction that their landlord listens to their views and takes notice of them
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord's engagement with tenants

# Chapter 2: Know how your landlord is performing 4

## Draft Performance Measures

- % of communal areas meeting the required standard
- Number of complaints relating to communal areas, relative to the size of the landlord
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord actions to keep communal areas clean and safe
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord contribution to the neighbourhood associated with their home
- Number of complaints relating to anti-social behaviour, relative to the size of the landlord
- Tenant satisfaction with landlord's handling of anti-social behaviour
- Tenant overall satisfaction with the service their landlord provides

# Chapter 2: Know how your landlord is performing 5

## Impacts

- More performance measures to include in Annual Report with a focus on building safety and compliance
- Real time data and technology needed to support publication
- Greater level of detail on expenditure
- <sup>SS</sup> Likely to be greater scrutiny on Housing Revenue Account spend which is ring-fenced by statute so that rental income can only be spend on activities that relate to the management and maintenance of the tenants homes
- More work with Ambassadors to understand spending
- Responsible person for ensuring Consumer Standards are being met

# Chapter 3: Complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

- Building Safety Bill removed democratic filter, speeding up access to the Housing Ombudsman
- Expanded the Housing Ombudsman service which is aiming to halve its decision times by March 2022.
- Increased the Housing Ombudsman's powers to take action against landlords where needed. The Housing Ombudsman has published a new Complaint Handling Code.
- Two stage complaint process, not three with 10 day max response time

# Chapter 3: Complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

- Support improved complaint handling by landlords and hold them to account through stronger action by the Housing Ombudsman.
- MHCLG to run an awareness campaign to publicise complaining
- MHCLG to formalise and strengthen the relationship between the Regulator of Social Housing and the Housing Ombudsman by introducing a statutory requirement for both bodies to co-operate with each other in undertaking their responsibilities in holding landlords to account.
- MHCLG to make the Housing Ombudsman a statutory consultee for any proposal concerning changes to the Regulator of Social Housing's economic and consumer standards.
- MHCLG to make the Regulator of Social Housing a statutory consultee for any changes to the Housing Ombudsman Scheme.

# Chapter 3: Complaints dealt with promptly and fairly

## Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Impacts

- Moving to a two stage process
- Need to adopt the HO definition of a complaint
- Need to publish exclusions (vexatious complaints)
- Updated policy and process to be available on-line
- Reasonable adjustments policy to be in place
- Complaint officer post to be recruited
- Investigating officers to have autonomy and authority
- Continuing to promote tenants being able to complain

# Chapter 4: To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator for tenants 1

- Strengthened the remit and powers of the RSH
- RSH to proactively monitor and drive landlords' compliance with its consumer standards.
- Remove the 'serious detriment test' and introduce routine inspections for the largest landlords (with over 1,000 homes) every four years.
- RSH's objectives to explicitly cover safety and transparency, reviewing consumer standards
- RSH to have the power to publish a Code of Practice on the consumer standards to be clearer on what landlords are required to deliver.
- Strengthen RSH's enforcement powers to tackle failing landlords and to respond to new challenges facing the sector, including removing the cap on the level of fines it can issue, introducing Performance Improvement Plans for landlords failing to comply, and introducing a new power to arrange emergency repairs if needed where a survey uncovers evidence of systemic landlord failures.
- Set out an expectation for all landlords to self-refer breaches with the regulatory standards.

# Chapter 4: To be treated with respect, backed by a strong consumer regulator for tenants 2

- Continued Co-regulation
- “The existing regulatory regime works on the basis of co-regulation. This means that it is the responsibility of the boards of housing associations and other private providers of social housing, or of Councillors in local authority landlords, to be assured that they comply with the outcome focused standards set by the regulator”
- On safety, “Driving and embedding culture change throughout organisations is the collective responsibility of Boards and, in the case of local authorities, Councillors.”
- Landlords to identify and make public a nominated person responsible for compliance with their health and safety requirements.

# Chapter 5: To have your voice heard by your landlord 1

- RSH to require landlords to seek out best practice and consider how they can continually improve the way they engage with social housing tenants.
- RSH to deliver a new opportunities and empowerment programme for social housing residents, to support more effective engagement between <sup>88</sup> landlords and residents, and to give residents tools to influence their landlords and hold them to account.
- RSH to review professional training and development to ensure residents receive a high standard of customer service.

# Chapter 5: To have your voice heard by your landlord 2

## Impacts

- Engagement is more than just resident involvement with landlords.
- Additional training for tenants on how to engage
- Tackling loneliness through ongoing engagement with tenants
- Tailored engagement for individual tenants
- Meeting tenants personally and finding out:
  - What matters to each tenant
  - Check on the general condition of the home (unreported repairs/damp)
  - Gather information on protected characteristics, contact preferences, reasonable adjustments needed and contacts
  - Promote tenant portal to aid channel shift and effective reporting of repairs etc

# Chapter 6: To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in 1

- Decarbonisation of social housing grants
- Health and wellbeing initiatives, promoting more and better green spaces
- Review the Decent Homes Standard to consider if it should be updated, including how it can better support the decarbonisation and energy efficiency of social homes, and improve communal and green spaces.
- Continue to engage with the latest evidence on the impact of housing conditions on health, including COVID-19 transmission, and actively consider options to mitigate these impacts.
- Review professionalisation to consider how well housing staff are equipped to work with people with mental health needs and encourage best practice for landlords working with those with mental health needs.
- Clarify the roles of agencies involved in tackling anti-social behaviour and signpost tenants to those agencies who can give them the most appropriate support and assistance when faced with anti-social behaviour.
- Consider the results of the allocations evidence collection exercise findings to ensure that housing is allocated in the fairest way possible and achieves the best outcomes for local places and communities.

# Chapter 6: To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in 2

- Much greater support for tenants facing anti-social behaviour and crime
- MHCLG to work with the NHF and LGA to encourage social landlords to inform residents of their right to make a community trigger application
- RSH to review regulatory standards to make it clear that landlords should have a policy setting out how they should tackle issues surrounding domestic abuse
- Supporting the Armed Forces Community

# Chapter 6: To have a good quality home and neighbourhood to live in - Impacts

- Greater engagement with tenants on carbon reduction initiatives
- Higher quality of green space provision
- Increased regime of estate quality inspections needs resourcing
- Strong emphasis on improving ASB services and support for victims of ASB
- Strong emphasis on dealing with domestic abuse
- ASB and the estate to be included in performance indicators

# Chapter 7: To be supported to take your first step to ownership

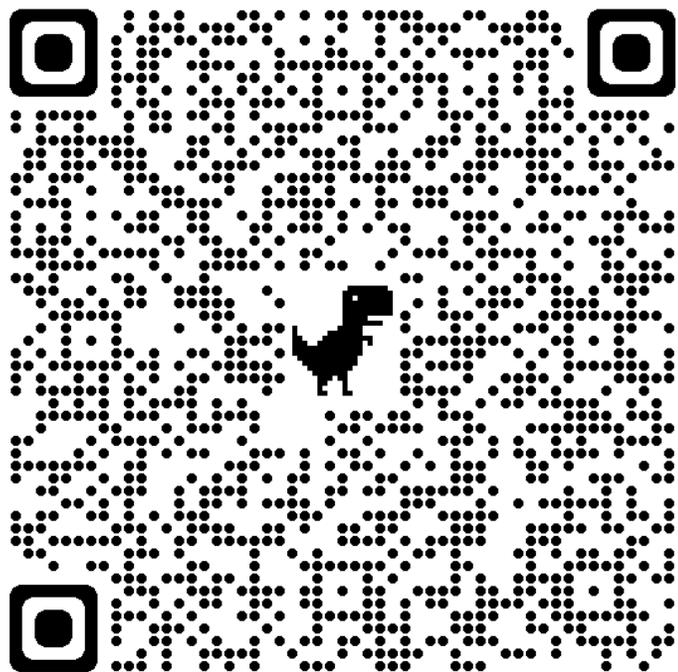
- Raft of initiatives to promote building social rent homes and ownership
- Helping residents into home ownership
- New shared ownership model
- Continuing to support the Right to Buy
- Leasehold reform and supporting leaseholders

# Summary

- Upping the game
- Wide range of new activities and “new work”
- Lots of engagement work is essential to understand tenants concerns and needs
- Focus on tenants first, listening to them, respecting them and then what affects them:
  - The home and the quality of the home
  - The estate and the environment
  - Fire safety
  - Building safety
  - Consumer standards and ASB
- Significant budget investment needed to deliver
- Don't wait for legislation and regulation

You can read the full version of “The Social Housing White Paper: The Charter for Social Housing Residents” at [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/936098/The charter for social housing residents - social housing white paper.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/936098/The_charter_for_social_housing_residents_-_social_housing_white_paper.pdf) or using the QR code from a smart phone or device.

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**Questions?**

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Housing and Homelessness Panel made during its mini-review of Tenant Involvement and Empowerment and signed off by Scrutiny on 12.04.22

A response will be provided by the Cabinet Member for Affordable Housing, Housing Security and Housing the Homeless, but Scrutiny does not expect the responses until post-election

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<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
1) That the Council identifies appropriate thresholds above which procurement or interview-focused ambassadors will be invited to be involved in the respective process.		
2) That the Council establishes a board with Cabinet member, senior officers and tenant and leaseholder representatives to meet on a regular basis to discuss tenant and leaseholder issues, and to report on progress and performance.		
3) That the Council makes the greatest effort to ensure that tenant representatives on the board reflect the geographic and demographic diversity of the Council's tenants.		
4) That the Council establishes the planned Housing Development Working Group as a matter of priority, that it includes within its scope issues relating to interior design of the homes built, and that a more precise name is agreed.		
5) That the Council implements ways to recognise the contributions of tenant ambassadors which do not incur universal credit clawback or other benefit issues.		
6) That the Council recruits more tenant		

## Appendix 4: Recommendations

	ambassadors from younger age groups, particularly to participate in the Housing Development Working Group and Great Estates		
	7) That the Council recruits a tenant ambassador to represent the views of older, frailer residents.		
	8) That the Council interrogates the data at ward-level from the census (when available), and the tenant satisfaction survey, alongside the knowledge of locality workers to develop a profile of the specific needs of each ward, and that this is shared with members and used to identify priorities for work planning at community level.		
	9) That the Council works to develop a distinct Housing identity		
	10) That the Council ceases to make reference to 'customers' or 'clients' in its reports unless the relationship is genuinely commercial.		
	11) That in the event that the Tenants Forum established by the DSS discrimination motion does decide not to pursue a joint Council and private rented sector structure, that the Council ensures that a Council Tenants Forum continues to be provided.		
	12) That the Council prioritises the collection of the KPIs required for distribution by the Social Housing white paper.		
	13) That the Council publishes, in addition to the annual report required by the Social Housing white paper, live performance data on its website, and distributes performance details to tenants in each Tenants in Touch magazine.		

## Appendix 4: Recommendations

<p><b>14) That in its reporting against Social Housing white paper KPIs the Council benchmarks against relevant comparators</b></p>		
<p><b>15) That the Council reviews whether the structures to enable tenants to challenge areas of spend under the Social Housing white paper are sufficient to give tenants meaningful challenge to Council spending</b></p>		
<p><b>16) That the Council implements and promotes a clearer process for councillors and tenants to influence the spending of the Great Estates programme.</b></p>		
<p><b>17) That the Council implements a councillor casework system for housing issues within QL within 12 months</b></p>		
<p><b>18) That the Council holds discussions with Thames Valley Police to determine whether additional resources for community policing have become available, and to propose reinstating Neighbourhood Action Groups or similar ward-based stakeholder meetings in priority areas if so.</b></p>		
<p><b>19) That the Council undertakes preparatory work with the Police to enable joint-working at a locality level to be established as quickly as possible.</b></p>		

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