

Executive response

Report of the Local Economy Scrutiny Group: Support for Businesses in the City Centre

Recommendation	Agreed? (Y / N / In part)	Comment	Board Member / Lead Officer
<p>1. We recommend that the City Council:</p> <p>a) Ensures that information about appealing to the Valuation Office Agency is made available to local businesses. In particular, this information should be communicated to all independent traders who may be affected by the major redevelopments taking place in Oxford.</p> <p>b) Takes any opportunities to join with other local authorities to lobby the new Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for more council controls over business rates.</p>	yes	There is no doubt that business rate reform and/or local capacity to benefit from business rate growth on a more generous basis are major issues for local government. The devolution agenda will also have a bearing on these issues.	Matt Peachey
<p>2. We recommend that the City Council works with the County Council through the Town Team to agree on a single united channel of regular communications to businesses, such as about travel disruptions, supported by a single online source of information.</p>	yes		City Centre Manager
<p>3. We recommend that the City Council develops a more corporate approach to communicating with businesses, including guidance for all departments whose work has an impact or involvement with businesses. This could take the form of defining a central point of contact within the City Council, which can identify the appropriate unit to respond on specific issues, including the County Council as appropriate.</p>	no	The Communications team will examine this recommendation and consider what elements of it will be feasible and useful to take forward	Head of Comms

4. We recommend that the City Council works with partners through the Town Team to reinforce the coordinated overall marketing and publicity campaign for Oxford in ways that cover all major potential audiences.	yes	The Town Team should also work closely with the Chief exec of Experience Oxfordshire on marketing and publicity for the city	City Centre Manager
5. We recommend that the City Council develops a one stop shop function for events. This exercise should include a review of the costs and processes associated with aspects such as permission for road closures, stall licences and permits for distributing leaflets.	possibly	The Events Team already provides a pretty comprehensive one stop shop function within the City Council but they have to work alongside County Council officers on highways issues, which inevitably results in a less than fully comprehensive service. Worth exploring the scope for greater integration	Peter McQuitty/Alison Drummond
6. We recommend that the City Council produces a simple analysis of the costs and benefits of pop up shops to landlords and the City Council.	no	The costs and benefits will vary so widely that this is likely to be a nugatory exercise.	
7. We recommend that the City Council takes a lead in establishing and facilitating a city centre commercial property landlord forum. This would be intended to bring together the owners of commercial properties, including the City Council, to ensure that there is a coordinated approach towards issues affecting the city centre, such as the minimisation of the time during which premises are empty. The forum could be chaired by the Leader of the Council, linked to the work of the Town Team and constituted based on the model of the previous Pensions and Language School forums. We also suggest that its membership should include a representative of each political group and that City Councillors should be able to observe meetings of the forum.	yes	This is a worthwhile initiative and worth trying, although there is an obvious danger that it would simply replicate the Town Team's work. The TOR would have to be very carefully written.	Jane Winfield

<p>8. We recommend that the City Council leads on the development of a long term strategy for the city centre as a whole. This should include a commitment to developing and supporting vibrant and distinct city quarters away from prime sites, in locations such as Gloucester Green, Jericho/Observatory Quarter, Market Street, Broad Street and a possible arts quarter around the Ashmolean Museum.</p>	yes	Work is already under way in the Planning Policy team on a city centre strategy.	Rachel Williams
<p>9. We recommend that dedicated officer time is allocated to the development and delivery of this city centre strategy. This could be funded wholly or in part via a BID and by additional business rates income that the role will generate, via reduced voids in commercial properties.</p>	prematu re	When we have an agreed strategy, the resource implications will be assessed. The Town Team will be continuing their consideration of a BID over the next few months. The initiative lies with the business community	
<p>10. We recommend that the City Council's next Asset Strategy (2016-2020) builds upon the aim (not always presently achieved) of utilising City Council assets in ways that can provide wider strategic benefits to the city centre. The Asset Strategy could provide clear guidelines on the use of City Council-owned commercial premises to ensure the diversity and vitality of the city's wider retail offer.</p>	no	This recommendation will be remitted to the Asset management team for consideration with the portfolio holder and key officers when work on the 2016-20 strategy is started.	David Edwards/Jane Winfield

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