

To: City Executive Board

Date: 6 April 2017

Report of: Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Public safety and addressing anti-social behaviour on Oxford's waterways

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To present the recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee on public safety and addressing anti-social behaviour on Oxford's waterways

Scrutiny Lead Member: Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of Scrutiny

Executive lead member: Councillor Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety

Recommendation of the Scrutiny Committee to the City Executive Board:

That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations set out in the body of this report.

Background

1. The Scrutiny Committee scrutinised this report at a meeting on 27 March 2017. The Committee would like to thank Cllr Dee Sinclair, Board Member for Community Safety, and Richard Adams, Community Safety and Resilience Manager, for attending the meeting to present the report and answer questions, and Cllr Liz Wade for addressing the Committee.

Findings and recommendations

2. The Board Member for Community Safety introduced the report. She highlighted the four areas of concern and the range of intervention options that had been identified following the preliminary consultation. She said that the Council had been listening to all concerned and would continue to do so. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager highlighted the proposal to undertake a review of the waterways as a whole. He said that the waterways should be viewed as an asset that presents various opportunities that should be identified and developed.

3. The Committee welcomed the excellent example of engagement that had taken place, the proposed review of the waterways as a whole, the carefully prepared Equalities Impact Assessment and the narrowing of focus since the previous report a year ago, which had proposed a PSPO for the entirety of the Oxford waterways (and was not supported by a majority of the Committee at the time).
4. The Committee considered the feedback provided by different groups in the preliminary consultation. Members heard that land owners had tended to support the original waterways PSPO proposal, boaters had not supported it and businesses had asked for specific issues to be tackled, such as drug use and paraphernalia. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager said that the engagement had been high quality and provided assurance that the level of response had been very good for an engagement exercise of this nature.
5. The Committee raised concerns that a PSPO was listed as an intervention option on the Folly Bridge to Iffley Lock stretch of the River Thames, given that this was a big stretch of river. The Committee also raised concerns about issues such as sewage dumping in this stretch of river, which was popular with rowers and tourists. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager advised that PSPOs could be suitable in particular hotspots. No decisions had been taken yet on which intervention options would be utilised and there would be a process to go through.
6. The Committee questioned what powers the Council had to enter and inspect boats when concerns about sanitation and safety had been identified. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager explained that gaining the right of entry was difficult but that the Private Sector Safety Team had some limited powers that had been used at Castle Mill Stream.
7. The Committee sought assurances that strong partnerships were in place to support potentially vulnerable people living on the Oxford waterways and that clear pathways were in place with clear responsibilities that worked seamlessly in practice. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager advised that pathways were in place but that the crucial issue was one of effective engagement with particular individuals living in squalor on the waterways who had complex needs and chaotic lifestyles. Triage was used in high demand cases and there had been a small number of positive interventions.
8. The Committee considered the extent to which fumes from boats were a problem at Aristotle Lane, adjacent to a playground, and heard opposing views about this and the significance of a resident's complaints. The Community Safety and Resilience Manager said that the impact of smoke can vary in different climatic conditions and that some fumes (e.g. diesel emissions) were more visible than others. The Council had investigated on some 70 occasions whether fumes at Aristotle Lane constituted a statutory nuisance in response to complaints. To date a statutory nuisance had not been identified but that did not mean that fumes were not a real issue at Aristotle Lane at certain points in time. The Council was also supportive of a 'quiet zone' at this location including a limit of two boats being present during winter months (with some specific exceptions allowed).

9. In response to a question about riparian land ownership, the Committee heard that the problem of identifying land owners was a significant and complex problem to resolve. The provision of additional temporary and permanent moorings, which was identified as being integral to addressing safety issues at the areas of concern, would also be challenging to achieve. The Council wanted to achieve a regularised environment with sensible solutions to these issues.
10. The Committee considered a proposal to recommend to the City Executive Board that a PSPO should be a solution of last resort. This proposal was not supported by a majority of the Committee. It was supported by a minority of the Committee.
11. The Committee noted that the timetable for addressing the four areas of concern and conducting a review into the wider use of the waterways is dependent upon identifying resources to take this work forward. The Committee strongly support this work and hope that appropriate resources can be made available at the earliest opportunity.

Recommendation 1 – That resources are made available at the earliest opportunity for addressing the areas of concern and conducting a wider review of the use of the Oxford waterways.

12. The Committee requested a progress report in 12 months time.

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