

**To:** City Executive Board  
**Date:** 13 March 2019  
**Report of:** Scrutiny Committee  
**Title of Report:** Scrutiny Committee Recommendations Concerning Street Art and Graffiti

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning Street Art and Graffiti
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Executive Board Member:</b>	Councillor Tom Hayes, Board Member for Safer, Greener, Environment
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	A Clean and Green Oxford; Strong and Active Communities
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Corporate Plan 2016 - 2020
<b>Recommendation: That the City Executive Board states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.</b>	

## Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee requested an agenda item focused on graffiti prevention and removal as part of its annual work plan for 2018-19. At its meeting on 5 February 2019, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report concerning the use of Street Art in the City, and a proposal to change the Council's approach to removing graffiti from private property. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Hayes, Board Member for Safer, Greener Oxford, and Councillor Chapman, Board Member for Customer Focussed Services, for attending the meeting. Thanks also go to Allison Cassidy, Anti-Social Behaviour Case Manager, and Bruce Thompson, City Centre and Streetscene Services Manager, for their support at the meeting.

## Summary and recommendations

2. The Committee was pleased to note that despite significant increases in the number of instances of graffiti recorded between 2015 and 2017, the Council had equally

increased its rates of removal to match this challenge. This should be seen as a success for the Council, and councillors commented specifically on the good work and responsiveness of Oxford Direct Services (ODS) and the Anti-social Behaviour Investigation Team (ASBIT). The Committee also shared the Board Member for Safer, Greener Oxford's commendation of the work of Allison Cassidy, who had developed strong links with local artists to the benefit of the City.

3. The Committee heard from the Board Member for Customer Focused Services that ODS, a wholly owned company of the Council, would now be seeking to remove graffiti from private property in public spaces within 48 hours for free (with the exception of larger commercial ventures, which ODS would continue to ask to pay), where it was safe to do so and consent was gained. It was also positive to see that high response standards would be set for the removal of offensive graffiti.
4. In light of previous instances of issuing Community Protection Notices and fines to private property owners who did not remove graffiti, this was seen as an unfavourable option as it served to penalise people who had already been the victim of a crime. It was positive and understandable that the issuing of CPNs had therefore been limited to being used only once under the previous policy.
5. On that basis, broad support was given for the new approach, particularly in light of the evidence base which suggests quick removal deters further instances of graffiti. The Committee also welcomed the approach of seeking blanket waivers from utility companies to permit the Council to remove graffiti from their property, given that utility companies had not always been particularly reactive to single instances of graffiti.
6. The Committee highlighted and discussed the possible correlation between the declining number of youth services in the City and the rising instances of graffiti. It was explicitly noted however that graffiti is perpetrated by people of all ages, and is not isolated only to younger generations. This is part of a wider challenge that the City faces in ensuring there are appropriate community activities and support services available, which have declined in recent years due to County Council and Central Government funding cuts.
7. It was noted that the extent of the new approach may mean that more time and resources will be used to tackle graffiti, but time would equally be saved by avoiding the previous burdensome process of convincing private property owners to pay for the work themselves. The demand this new approach places on the resources of the Council and ODS should therefore be monitored. The Committee noted that the Council will continue to charge larger commercial ventures for the removal of graffiti however, but the way in which larger ventures would be defined could be clearer.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council considers how best to define 'larger commercial ventures' when requiring such private land owners to pay for the removal of graffiti, to ensure the policy is applied consistently.**

8. The Committee recognised that there is a distinction between street art and graffiti. The former can represent an expression of the values and views of a community and have a very positive effect when developed in consultation with residents. The latter can be an unacceptable blight on the public realm.

9. The appreciative enquiry organised by the ASBIT team in 2015, which involved over 60 people, resulted in free wall space being provided for local artists to use in South Park. The Committee was pleased to note that since then, instances of graffiti had reduced significantly. Equally, at the Murco Site in 2017, a well sized consultation identified broad public support for free wall space in the area. The Committee agreed that street art was most valuable where it involved consultation with a wide range of stakeholders, and was well placed (for example, not on historic structures).

**Recommendation 2: That the Council engages more widely with residents and other stakeholders (for example through an appreciative enquiry) concerning the use of Street Art in deterring graffiti in and around Meadow Lane.**

10. Councillors highlighted that commercial security shutters were often targeted overnight for graffiti, and this was unsightly once the shops were closed. The Committee wished for the Council to look at more creative ways of deterring graffiti on these shutters, possibly through the use of street art. This could be particularly effective where the properties are owned by the Council, and consent is gained from the lessee.

**Recommendation 3: That the City Executive Board considers how the Council can be creative in deterring graffiti on the commercial security shutters of retail units owned by the Council, to improve the public realm. This could be achieved through the use of street art projects, for example.**

11. The Committee notes that Oxford Direct Services delivers a significant amount of services on the Council’s behalf. Going forward, there could be more clarity in the decision making process about which matters are reserved to decision making within the Council, and which matters remain operational, and reserved to ODS. The Committee expects that all matters reserved to the Council will continue to be open to pre-decision scrutiny in the normal way.

**Recommendation 4: That the Council ensures that decision making processes relating to the delivery of services through Council-owned companies remain open to pre-decision scrutiny, where those matters are reserved for decision making within the Council.**

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