

***DRAFT CONTENT (PRIOR TO GRAPHIC DESIGN  
AND SUBJECT TO A PROOF READ)***

## **2018/19 Annual Report of Oxford City Council's Scrutiny Committee**

## Chair and Vice-Chair's Foreword

In its report dated December 2017, Parliament's select committee on Local Government noted that "the most significant factor in determining whether or not scrutiny committees are effective is the organisational culture of a particular council. Having a positive culture where it is universally recognised that scrutiny can play a productive part in the decision-making process is vital". We believe Oxford is well served in this respect. The Scrutiny committee is able to access information and call Cabinet members and senior officers to speak to us. Equally importantly, we are well served by our own officers, and we would like to thank both our dedicated Scrutiny Officer and all who have supported our work in Democratic Services and other departments.

Our job is to ensure this continues. We have worked hard this year at investigating and addressing issues around the council's leisure centres and how best to monitor performance. Other areas of concern to members are reflected in the report which follows.

Percentage of recommendations accepted is often taken as a measure of success. My view is that we should sometimes be seeking to get the administration to think further than it might feel comfortable, and that therefore a number of "No" replies show us doing our job. A feature of our work has been an increase in recommendations agreed "in part". These often require some interpretation, and a number have been referred back to Cabinet by the committee. Again, this is Scrutiny working well.

Scrutiny depends on the input of ideas. We would continue to encourage all members of council to engage by attending and speaking at our meetings, tabling ideas for us to look at, and to encourage their ward residents to do the same.



Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair, Scrutiny Committee 2018/19



Councillor Joe McManners, Vice Chair, Scrutiny Committee 2018/19

## **About the Scrutiny Committee**

Most major Council decisions are taken by the Cabinet (previously the City Executive Board), which is made up of ten elected councillors from the controlling political group. In operating this form of decision-making arrangement, the Council is required by law to have a Scrutiny Committee made up of elected councillors who are not on the Cabinet.

The Scrutiny Committee acts as a counterweight to the Cabinet, empowering twelve cross-party 'backbench' councillors to hold the Cabinet to account for the decisions they take, and contribute to council decision-making. The Scrutiny Committee can also investigate any issue that affects the city or its residents, regardless of whether it is within the direct responsibility of the Cabinet.

The work of Scrutiny helps to provide assurance that the Council is performing well, delivering value for money, and taking the best decisions it can to improve public services and the quality of life for the residents of Oxford.

Committee meetings are held almost every month at the Town Hall, and residents are encouraged to attend and address the Committee on any issues on the agenda. Generally, the Committee will consider a balance of forthcoming decisions to be made by the Cabinet, and a number of other issues that are not necessarily the subject of a forthcoming decision, but merit further investigation.

The Committee agrees a work plan at the start of each year which sets out the various topics and issues that councillors have chosen to focus on. Some of these issues are delegated to themed standing panels, which meet approximately five times each year, and to topical review groups where more detailed scrutiny is required over a series of meetings.

## **Making the case for change**

Importantly, for the Committee to be effective, it must produce well-reasoned evidence based recommendations to the Cabinet concerning service improvement. The Committee has no power to require that decisions be revised, but a robust argument for change will go a long way in persuading the Cabinet to review their decisions.

## **Summary of scrutiny activity during 2018/19**

### **Member engagement**

Over 60% of non-executive members from across all political parties were involved in the Scrutiny function.

### **Meetings**

41 meetings were held in total:

- 11 Scrutiny Committee meetings
- 5 Housing Panel meetings
- 4 Finance Panel meetings
- 3 Budget Review Group meetings
- 5 Companies Panel meetings
- 6 No Local Connection Review Group Meetings

- 7 Tourism Management Review Group Meetings

### Items

61 substantive items were considered:

- 25 Cabinet decisions
- 7 Reports from council companies
- 29 Reports on other issues prioritised by Scrutiny

### Reports

20 reports were presented to the Cabinet including major reports on:

- No Local Connection (Homelessness)
- Budget

### Recommendations

The total number of recommendations put to the Cabinet was 83, with over four in five (83%) of them being agreed or agreed in part.

Agreed	58	70%
Agreed in part	11	13%
Not agreed	14	17%

This represents an increase in the number of recommendations made in the previous year.

### Call in

Call in is a statutory function that enables councillors to challenge decisions that have been taken before they are implemented. If a call in request from any 4 councillors or the Chair of Scrutiny is deemed valid, then the Committee will hear both sides of the argument and decide whether or not to refer the decision back to the Cabinet (or individual councillors in the case of decisions about the use of ward member budgets), with reasons why the decision should be re-considered. During 2018/19 many important Cabinet decisions were subject to pre-decision scrutiny and there were no call-ins.

### Get involved

There are many opportunities for members of the public and representatives of organisations to get involved in the work of Scrutiny. The Committee would welcome an increase in the number of people attending to speak at its meetings, which are held at 6pm in the Town Hall (unless otherwise stated). Members of the public can:

- Attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee, standing panels and review groups, except in instances where confidential information is to be discussed. Details of these meetings are displayed in the Town Hall and on our [website](#).
- Speak at a meeting on any agenda item with the prior agreement of the Chair. Please email [democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:democraticservices@oxford.gov.uk) and give at least 24 hours' notice.
- Suggest a topic for Scrutiny to consider by completing and submitting a Work Plan [Suggestion Form](#).
- Raise issues with your local City Councillor and request that Scrutiny considers this as part of a 'Councillor Call for Action', a mechanism by which

members of the public can have issues of concerned given consideration by the Scrutiny Committee.

- Watch out for consultations, surveys and requests for evidence by registering at <http://www.oxford.gov.uk/consultation>.

## Scrutiny Committee

### Membership:

Councillor Andrew Gant (Chair)	Councillor Alex Donnelly
Councillor Joe McManners (from 17 Oct) (Vice-Chair)	Councillor James Fry
Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan	Councillor David Henwood (to 18 Nov) (Vice Chair)
Councillor Lubna Arshad	Councillor Pat Kennedy
Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers	Councillor Mark Lygo (from 23 July)
Councillor Tiago Corais	Councillor Christine Simm (to 1 August)
Councillor Steve Curran (from 26 Nov)	Councillor Craig Simmons
Councillor Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini	

The Scrutiny Committee is responsible for the overall management of the Council's Scrutiny function. It decides which topics, issues and decisions will be considered and how. These items are all listed in an annual work plan which is agreed each summer and reviewed regularly during the year to take account of any emerging issues and upcoming Cabinet decisions. An up to date copy of the Committee's Work Plan can be found on the [Council website](#).

The Committee also sets the remits and membership of its standing panels, which are themed sub-committees that consider all issues and decisions within their given remit. The Committee has agreed to continue with the Finance Panel and Housing Panel, which have been running for a number of years and are well established. In early 2017, the Committee chose to set up a Companies Panel to oversee the Council's arm's length trading and housing companies, and the Committee opted to continue this arrangement for 2018/19.

A small number of issues prioritised by the Committee can be delegated to review groups for more detailed scrutiny. Review groups actively engage with partner organisations and expert witnesses before producing substantial evidence-based reports with recommendations. This year, two review groups were run focusing on homelessness and the impact of having 'No Local Connection', and Tourism Management (further details are below) as well as the annual review of the Council's budget and medium term financial strategy. As the commissioner of this work the Committee approved the reports of the review groups for submission to Cabinet.

A significant proportion of Cabinet decisions were also considered by the Committee, including annual decisions on safeguarding, the Discretionary Housing Payments Policy, and community grant allocations. Non-recurring Cabinet items subjected to scrutiny by the Committee included the Joint Statutory Spatial Plan and the steps taken by the Council to ensure that slavery and human trafficking were not occurring across the Council's business or supply chains.

In addition to the scrutiny of decisions being considered by Cabinet the Committee has scrutinised topic areas it has identified as particular priorities. This work has included reviewing the Council's draft Local Plan, recycling, air quality, the accessibility of the Town Hall building, staff sickness and wellbeing, continued monitoring of the impact the opening of the Westgate on the city centre, and graffiti prevention and removal. In many cases these items resulted in recommendations being submitted to Cabinet.

The Committee considered a 12 month update report on the implementation of the recommendations of the Oxford Living Wage Review Group, which had been established in 2017/18. The focus of that review had been on reinvigorating the ten year old Council policy of paying staff and contracted staff at least the level of the Oxford Living Wage, which is higher than the legal minimum wage to reflect the high housing costs in the city, and encouraging other local employers to do so too. The Committee found that the number of Oxford headquartered organisations accredited as Living Wage Employers had increased by one third from March 2018 to March 2019. The Committee also welcomed the ambition for Oxford to be accredited as a 'real living wage city' and proposals for a self-accreditation scheme for employers paying the Oxford Living Wage.

Another key focus for the Committee was the performance of the Council's leisure centres, which are managed by a social enterprise partner organisation called Fusion Lifestyle. At the start of the year the Committee was disappointed to find there had been a decline in visitor numbers, despite Oxford remaining one of the most physically active cities in the country. The Committee made a number of recommendations aimed at better understanding and addressing this trend such as making leisure services more inclusive and accessible to target groups and tackling maintenance issues.

The Committee also monitored Council performance on a quarterly basis and held the organisation to account for underperformance when required, as well as seeking to improve the standard and accessibility of the performance data. Key performance indicators that the Committee monitored related to customer care, job creation and training in the local community, and carbon-reduction.

The Committee would like to thank everyone who has played a part in the Scrutiny process this year including Scrutiny councillors, members of the Cabinet, council officers, representatives of partner organisations, expert witnesses and the public.

## The No Local Connection Review Group



*“Between 2012 and 2017 levels of homelessness in Oxford grew by 400% yet 69% of those counted as homeless were considered to have ‘no local connection’ to the area, rendering them ineligible under existing criteria for basic services such as places to live or access to support pathways.*

*Amidst a profound and growing challenge in which existing structures did not address the needs of the significant majority of those in need the Scrutiny Committee agreed in 2018 to carry out an in-depth review, the first of its kind, into the specific impact the Local Connection Policy has on people without a local connection. The review was very positive, stimulated lots of debate and shed light into this complex social and political issue. It also created links among the various stakeholders who passionately want homelessness to end. I would like to give a big thank you to our council officers and to all our guests who contributed their time freely to provide evidence and make this review possible. I would also like to thank the Gatehouse who provided an open and inclusive space so that our guests with lived experiences of homelessness were able to speak freely. The outcome of this crucial work has been to improve and broaden the level of support available to rough sleepers without a local connection, improve interventions and reducing the barriers faced by specific groups in accessing housing thereby making a tangible difference to the lives of some of our most vulnerable residents.”*

**Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair of the No Local Connection Review Group 2018/19**

Levels of homelessness within Oxford are high relative to its population and have risen at a greater rate than the national average making the challenges arising from homelessness particularly acute for the city. On top of the quantitative pressures, however, homeless individuals are also often particularly vulnerable. Groups at highest risk of homelessness include young people leaving the care of local authorities, those leaving prison, and those suffering from domestic violence, a mental health problem, or substance or alcohol misuse. In 2017 69% of rough sleepers were not considered to have a ‘local connection’ to the area, precluding them, despite their elevated vulnerability, from access to the Council’s main source of support: the commissioned Adult Homeless Pathway.

In June 2018, the Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up a review group to assess what the impact of relaxing the Council’s local connection policy would mean for service users and the Council and to develop recommendations that might improve or broaden the level of services available to those without a local connection.

Key issues the review group sought to explore included:

1. What provision is already in place to support rough sleepers without a local connection?
2. How homelessness services are funded.
3. The views of service users, services providers and experts on how the local connection policy impacts on homeless people with and without a local connection.
4. Understanding the reconnection process for those without a local connection.



5. Consideration of alternative service models that could provide further assistance to persons with no pathway/ local connection, either by way of reconnection, support or accommodation (including faith groups operating without public funding) and the likely impacts of this.
6. The implications of relaxing the local connection policy including the risks, benefits, financial and resource implications.
7. National best practice, legislative requirements, and alternative approaches in relation to preventing and reducing homelessness.
8. Fact checking misconceptions about the provision of services.

The Review Group's findings and recommendations were informed by verbal and written evidence provided by internal and external policy experts, service providers and service users. Review Group members also carried out visits to other authorities and undertook focus group meetings.

The Review Group heard that whilst specific vulnerabilities could be deemed 'special circumstances' and exempt people from the need to have a local connection, the greater a homeless person's vulnerability the more difficult it was to prove a local connection. Local connection criteria were heard often to obstruct fast reconnections, access to essential services and required costly enforcement. Further evidence brought into question the likelihood that a relaxation of the local connection criteria would have a 'magnet' effect. The Review Group made recommendations to relax or extend local connection criteria for the following groups:

- Rough sleepers or sofa surfers within the city
- Those with an elevated risk to their health and safety by virtue of a physical or mental health condition
- Those escaping violence
- Those born in the city
- Those volunteering in the city
- Those with relatives in the city
- Those leaving the city to spend time in prison, hospital or rehab
- Those living very close to the city boundary, such as Botley and Kennington

In addition, the Review Group made a number of recommendations to ensure that services seeking to reconnect homeless people within the city with support networks elsewhere were effective and joined up whilst not penalising those who did not wish to reconnect. Further recommendations concerned ensuring housing allocation policy did not act as a barrier to homeless people being housed, the Council's commissioning and budget priorities, and communicating the work being undertaken by the Council with regards to homelessness.

In total, of the 25 recommendations made to it by the Scrutiny Committee, Cabinet agreed to fully implement 11 of the recommendations and 6 in part. Principally, the recommendations adopted by the Cabinet related to:

- Relaxing eligibility criteria for having a local connection
- Taking steps to improve the effectiveness of reconnection services
- Improving access to housing amongst those with specific needs
- Communicating internally and externally more effectively and more positively on issues around homelessness

In June 2019 the Housing Panel received a six month progress update on the implementation of agreed recommendations. The Panel noted that officers had

embraced the spirit and thinking of the Review Group's work and welcomed the excellent progress that had been made, including the plans for a new homelessness assessment centre and night shelter at Floyds Row which promised to transform the front end approach to supporting people experiencing homelessness.

## The Tourism Management Review Group



I was delighted to Chair this detailed and wide-ranging work stream on behalf of the Scrutiny committee, and would like to thank my fellow review group members, officers, and the many stakeholders who spoke to us. We looked at a range of issues of great concern to both residents and visitors. We were lucky enough to compare practice with other cities with similar challenges.

I am on record as regarding the Cabinet's response as disappointing in a number of respects. I hope the substance and vision of our work will be thoroughly embedded in thinking about the future of our beautiful, but vulnerable, city.

***Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Tourism Management Review Group 2018/19***

With 7 million annual visitors generating over £873 million of income for local businesses, and supporting almost one in every eight jobs in the city (14,000 jobs), tourism plays a vital role in Oxford's local economy and sustaining its cultural offer. However, significant visitor volumes do also bring their challenges for residents, particularly in relation to:

- Overcrowding on central pavements, particularly by large tour groups
- Coaches parking over cycle lanes and in inappropriate areas
- The condition of the public realm and public facilities in the city centre
- The need for pedestrian flows to be managed in an effective way.
- Street clutter, narrow footways and limited space for seating

In June 2018 the Scrutiny Committee resolved to set up a review group to identify opportunities for improving the visitor and resident experience, with a focus on improving the coordination of the tourism offering. Key issues the review group sought to explore included:

1. Is there a clear vision for tourism management in Oxford, and are partners aware of it?
2. How might the Council and its partners support private organisations to innovate? For example, the development of a city card for attractions and transport, or a city app.
3. What destination management model is best suited to Oxford?
4. What are the risks and benefits associated with the current and predicted number of visitors, particularly during peak season?
5. What are partners' plans to manage rising numbers of visitors?
6. What are other cities doing to promote and manage tourism that Oxford is not doing already, and what lessons can be learnt?
7. How are tourism management activities funded and resourced?
8. What work is planned to improve the public realm?

Over seven meetings held between February and May 2019 the Review Group sought and considered verbal and written evidence from a range of stakeholders including representatives from Experience Oxfordshire and Visit Britain, members and officers from local authorities of similar high-profile tourist destinations, service providers, residents, and specialist parking, transport and economic development representatives.

Key data and insights arising from the Review Group's information gathering included:

- In 2017 the value of visitor expenditure contributed £873 million to the local economy.
- On average, visitors for one or more nights spend on average £338 over the course of their trip (£406m of spend / 1.2m staying visits). Conversely, a day trip on average generates only £43 for the local economy (£277m of spend / 6.4m day trips). This equates to a spending ratio per visit of almost 8:1 for overnight visitors and day trippers respectively.
- Oxford was the 8<sup>th</sup> most visited city overnight in the UK in 2017, but the 4<sup>th</sup> most popular for day visits.
- Though overseas visitors only account for 11% of the visitors to the city, they contribute 40% of the overall visitor spend.
- Visitors are less likely to return to Oxford than most other city destinations, and their satisfaction is significantly lower on average than experienced elsewhere in the UK.
- Feedback from guests in the Review Group's work suggests that congestion, the condition of public toilets, homelessness, a density of souvenir shops and a lack of open spaces may all contribute to lower than expected visitor satisfaction.
- As part of the International Passenger Survey, which identified 15 destination attributes to measure the performance of destinations, no measures (including the history and heritage of Oxford) were rated significantly higher than the average for all cities. The following destination attributes for Oxford were rated significantly lower than the average for all cities:
  - The ease of getting around the destination
  - Being welcoming and friendly
  - The ease of getting to the destination
  - Its overall value for money
  - The shopping opportunities (pre Westgate redevelopment)
- Oxford lacks a clear vision and coordination between key stakeholders in regards to tourism management.

On the basis of its research the Review Group strongly affirmed the importance of tourism to Oxford and recognised the need to work proactively with other stakeholders to formulate and realise a vision for tourism in Oxford based on the following principles. Namely, that Oxford is:

- A city that welcomes all visitors (local, national and international)
- A city that aspires to have high quality, low carbon, transport facilities
- A destination which is best experienced through an overnight stay
- A gateway to other tourism destinations in the region

A total of 21 recommendations were made to Cabinet to develop this objective. These recommendations made concrete proposals to improve priority issues around

- Becoming more welcoming as a destination
- Coach management and transport planning
- Revenue generation from tourism
- Supporting and promoting partner organisations and initiatives
- Improving the public sphere.

Of the recommendations made, nine were agreed by Cabinet for full implementation with a further ten implemented partially. Recommendations that were endorsed wholly included steps to resource the extension of the tourist 'season', the creation of an officer lead for tourism matters within the Council, the promotion of the Oxford Living Wage to providers of tourist services, and steps to ensure coach travel and its specific needs are adequately managed in the future.

## Companies Panel

### Membership:

Councillor Tiago Corais  
Councillor James Fry (Chair)  
Councillor David Henwood (to 18 Nov)  
Councillor Richard Howlett (from 4 Dec)  
Councillor Tom Landell Mills  
Councillor Chewe Munkonge  
Councillor Craig Simmons



*The Companies Panel maintains an overview of the progress of the Council's two recently established groups of wholly owned companies and scrutinises strategic decisions taken by the Council as the owner of those companies. Oxford Direct Services provides a wide range of services to the Council and the wider city economy including street cleaning, waste and recycling services, building repairs and maintenance, civil engineering and motor transport services. Having transferred to a company structure on 1 April 2018, Oxford Direct Services had a successful year of trading and returned a higher than anticipated dividend to the Council, helping to support the Council's finances and service provision in the wake of funding cuts from central government. The Housing Group has also made progress towards delivering new housing with a range of tenures on smaller Council-owned sites across the city that would otherwise not be developed. The central government's recent about-turn on housing policy has removed the City Council's cap on direct Council investment in housing, and therefore a review is under way on the future role of the Housing Group. The success of both groups of companies will be critical to delivering the Council's objectives and supporting its medium term financial plan in the years ahead.*

**Councillor James Fry, Chair, Companies Panel 2018/19**

The Companies Panel was established in 2017 to scrutinise the decisions of the Shareholder for the Council's two wholly owned groups of companies; Oxford Direct Services and the Housing Group. The Shareholder is the members of Cabinet acting as the owner of the Council's companies. Due to the commercial nature of information before the Panel, much of the Panel's work is undertaken in private session.

The Companies Panel received quarterly update and performance reports from the Oxford Direct Services in July, November and February. The Panel was pleased to find that the transfer to the company structure had gone smoothly including the TUPE transfer of 712 staff whilst maintaining good trade union relations and the retention of all customers, with no disruption to the delivery of services. Councillors also welcomed the Managing Director's focus on customer satisfaction, building a strong health and safety culture, increasing apprenticeships and expanding the companies' capacity. The Panel reviewed Oxford Direct Services' performance against key performance indicators and discussed the key strategies for improving the services offered and exploiting new market opportunities. The Panel recommended ways in which the company performance measures could be improved together with a more comprehensive scorecard of financial indicators.

In relation to the Housing Group, the Companies Panel received bi-annual presentations on the housing development programme, which initially comprised eight schemes of varying size and complexity. The Panel found that the number of units that were deliverable within the programme had been revised down from 793 units in March 2018 to 740 units in June to adjust for planning restrictions, although the majority of this decrease was in the outright sale category rather than affordable housing. There were a number of lessons learnt to inform the shape of the development programme in future including the time taken from the initial scoping of the site to starting work, early engagement with the planning process and the procurement of building services for batches of sites to create a more attractive contract, in view of the difficulties securing builders, other tradesmen and professional services in South East England. The Panel also encouraged the Housing Group secure additional sites and build up a longer term pipeline of schemes.

## Finance Panel

### Membership:

Councillor Mohammed Altaf-Khan  
Councillor Tiago Corais (from 4 Dec)  
Councillor David Henwood (to 18 Nov)  
Councillor James Fry (Chair)  
Councillor Chewe Munkonge  
Councillor Craig Simmons  
Councillor Roz Smith



*As the challenge of securing adequate revenues for all Local Authorities becomes greater, as a result of reduced central government funding alongside greater demand for services, the importance of ensuring sound financial management becomes ever more crucial. The Finance Panel has been busy throughout the year providing an independent perspective on all aspects of the Council's finances, including analysis of the impact of and responses to Brexit and other major external factors. The Panel evaluates areas of spending and value for money, and monitors the return on investments and other sources of income. In doing so it has sought to safeguard the Council's financial capability to continue to maintain or expand services despite the ending of all central government Revenue Support Grants.*  
**Councillor James Fry, Chair, Finance Panel 2018/19**

The Finance Panel has a role in overseeing and scrutinising the Council's financial performance and budgetary proposals. The Panel monitors Council spend throughout the year, considers selected financial issues and decisions, and conducts a detailed annual review of the Council's budget and medium term spending proposals.

A significant piece of work undertaken by the Panel concerned recognition of how the Council could embed consideration of broader social benefits or 'social value' within the ways the Council spends its money via the procurement process. Following endorsement of the recommendations made to Cabinet, this has resulted in: social value becoming a recognised and weighted criterion in the Council's procurement processes, the adoption by the Council of payment-time standards to SMEs and the voluntary sector, and the introduction of the Green Procurement Policy into tenders. Other work undertaken by the Panel included the consideration of income generation from legal services and the potential impacts of Brexit, particularly in regards to recruitment locally, and the Council's investments and funding streams.

The Panel conducted its annual review of the Council's budget proposals over the New Year period, questioning senior managers about budgetary changes and testing assumptions about spending levels, income targets and financial pressures. In total 16 recommendations concerning principally the level of Council Tax, the financing of Council priorities and representations to central government were made. Thirteen of the 16 recommendations made by the Panel during the budget review process were accepted by the Cabinet.

Other financial decisions scrutinised by the Panel included decisions on the Council's Treasury Management Strategy and investment property development opportunities and the proposed changes to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The



Panel also reviewed the Council's quarterly financial reports to monitor spending and progress against savings targets.

## Housing Panel

### Membership:

Councillor Lubna Arshad  
Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers (Chair)  
Councillor Angie Goff (to 1 Oct)  
Councillor Michael Gotch  
Councillor David Henwood (to 18 Nov) (Chair)  
Councillor Richard Howlett  
Councillor Sian Taylor (from 4 Dec)  
Councillor Liz Wade (from 5 Feb)  
Councillor Dick Wolff



*Homelessness and the lack of affordable housing are huge issues in Oxford. During the year the Panel tracked a range of housing performance indicators and scrutinised the Council's Draft Local Plan which sets planning policies on affordable housing in the city. The Panel also played a key role in scrutinising and making recommendations in relation to a number of homelessness issues including the severe weather emergency protocol, the use of homelessness prevention funds, the outcomes of the innovative Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer and proposals for the development of a new homeless shelter and assessment hub at Floyds Row. The Housing Panel has been keen to ensure that the voices of service users including those with lived experience of homelessness are heard by the Council and the work undertaken to engage with homeless service users and involve them in the design of the facilities at Floyds Row has been particularly pleasing. I would like to thank Geno Humphrey who is stepping down after serving as the Panel's tenant co-optee for the last 4 years. I would also like to pay tribute to Councillor Angie Goff who sadly passed away in October 2018 having served on the Housing Panel since July 2016.*

**Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers, Chair, Housing Panel 2018/19**

Oxford is widely cited as one of the least affordable cities in the UK in which to buy or rent a home. The city's boundaries are tightly constrained and a lack of developable land within the city makes the delivery of sufficient affordable housing to meet the city's needs a major challenge for policy makers and requires the co-operation of neighbouring councils. In this context the Housing Panel dedicated its October meeting to scrutinising the housing related planning policies contained within the Council's draft Local Plan. The Panel explored how the city's unmet housing need is calculated and the policies aimed at maximising the delivery of affordable housing. The Panel welcomed the new focus on supporting employment-linked homes and also community-led self-build housing.

The Panel welcomed work undertaken to review the Council-owned garage sites across the city, an exercise that had identified some sites that could be viable for development by the Council's housing company and other sites that could be restored or replaced by parking spaces.

The Panel also considered options for the establishment of a Council-owned lettings agency to drive up standards in the local private rented sector and operate as a not for profit service for the benefit of residents, following on from a motion passed by

Council in 2016. The conclusion was that it was not feasible to develop a Council-run lettings agency in current private sector market conditions and other approaches to addressing poor standards in the private rented sector were considered to be working well.

Following the Grenfell tragedy the Panel discussed the work of the Council's Building Control function, which has a role in ensuring compliance with the minimum standards for design, construction and alteration to buildings set out in the Building Regulations. The Panel considered the competitive market that exists for building control services and the resilience of the service in view of difficulties recruiting and retaining Building Control surveyors. The Panel made recommendations about prioritising the employment and training of apprentices and ways of ensuring high quality building standards on Council-led developments.

In November and March the Panel considered the planning for and then the outcomes of the severe weather emergency protocol (SWEP) which provides additional emergency bed spaces in the winter period for people sleeping rough. The Panel made recommendations about improving communication and engaging with service users and local organisations for feedback about the SWEP and their experiences, and later found that the feedback gathered had been broadly positive.

The Panel considered a year one review of the Oxfordshire Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer; a multi-agency programme aiming to tackle systemic issues in the public sector which can increase the risk of homelessness. The programme comprised three strands; the embedding of housing workers within criminal justice, health and social care settings, community navigators identifying and working with people at risk of homelessness and the creation of a homeless champions network across partner organisations to broaden understanding of the housing system. The report highlighted that many people were left in beds when they were medically fit because they had no home to go to, at an indicative cost to the NHS of £1.2m. The Panel considered and welcomed the lasting legacy the programme would have through changing systems and services in order to reduce the risk of homelessness.

In April the Panel considered a report to the City Executive Board on the proposed development of a Homeless Shelter and Assessment Hub at Floyd's Row. The Panel questioned whether the funding envelope was realistic and considered the need to secure or allocate capital and revenue funding to deliver the scheme and commission services sustainably into the future. The Panel also recommended building on the positive engagement activities that had taken place involving service users to create an ongoing culture of participation at Floyds Row, notwithstanding the temporary nature of the services.

## **The year ahead**

The Scrutiny Committee has re-elected Councillor Andrew Gant as Chair for the 2019/20 Council year and Councillor Joe McManners as Vice-Chair. The Committee also welcomes new members of the Committee in Councillors Tiago Corais and Richard Howlett. Returning members to the Committee are Councillors; Mohammed Altaf-Khan, Lubna Arshad, Nadine Bely-Summers, Hosnieh Djafari-Marbini, Alex Donnelly, James Fry, Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan and Craig Simmons.

The Committee will continue to scrutinise decisions of the Cabinet, and a number of new issues affecting the city have been included in the Scrutiny Work Plan, including Planning for the 2020 Zero Emissions Zone, Community Wealth Building and Public Participation in Decision Making. The Committee has also re-appointed the Finance, Companies and Housing Standing Panels for another year.

Councillor James Fry has been reappointed as Chair of the Finance Panel. The Panel will again undertake a detailed annual review of the Council's budget proposals early in the New Year and will monitor financial performance and decisions through the year. The Companies Panel is also to be chaired by Councillor James Fry and will continue to consider the progress of the Council's wholly owned housing companies and Oxford Direct Services companies.

The Housing Panel will be chaired by Councillor Nadine Bely-Summers. The Panel will scrutinise a number of important housing-related issues, including the Council's response to homelessness and the balance of the Council's spending within the Housing Revenue Account. The Panel will also look to recommend ways to improve tenancy management standards across the wider social housing sector, as well as considering possible means of raising standards in the private rented sector.

## **Contact us**

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**Photographs of 2018/19 membership to be included**