

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 March 2021
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Council Business Plan 2021-22 and Business Plan 2020-21 update

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations concerning the Council Business Plan 2021-22 and Business Plan 2020-21 Update report
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Andrew Gant, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendation in the body of this report.	

Appendices
None

Introduction and overview

1. At its meeting on 02 March 2021, the Scrutiny Committee considered a report to Cabinet concerning the Council Business Plan 2021-22 and Business Plan 2020-21 Update.
2. The Panel would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown, Leader and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships for presenting the report,

and Mish Tullar, Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications Manager for authoring the report and answering questions.

Summary and recommendation

3. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, introduced the report. The last 12 months had been most unusual and, as a result, the focus had been on producing a plan which both met the Council's objectives as well as meeting the atypical needs faced by the City as it emerged from the pandemic. Members and officers across the Council had worked hard to secure the right objectives which were fit for purpose and informed by a high level of engagement with stakeholders. The plan included targets which were both exciting and realistic. The section on "Equalities Impact" was worthy of particular attention because of the way in which it exemplified the critical importance of equalities as a key theme throughout the plan. Cllr Brown went on to draw attention to a few examples such as the promotion of the Oxford Living Wage; the promotion of socially responsible businesses (which would be helped by the recently revised procurement strategy); and the importance of employment and economic recovery over the next year and beyond. Housing and homelessness comprised another important element, building on the good work of the last year. It continued to be important to deliver the Workforce Equalities Action Plan with its key objective of securing a properly representative and inclusive workforce.
4. Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications, emphasised that this ambitious plan was the product of significant engagement with, among others, all senior officers and portfolio holders. The plan had been constructed on the basis that it was deliverable (although this necessarily included assumptions about the ability to proceed with some activities as the current Covid-19 driven restrictions receded). The structure of the plan echoed that of the Council's 4 year strategy and this included, for the sake of clarity and conciseness, the capturing of an item in the plan just once. It was important not to misinterpret this as meaning that an item was not considered relevant or important in some other strand of the plan also. It was important also to note that the plan's focus was on transformative actions and not those which might be considered to be both important but also "business as usual." A great deal of thought had been given to the KPIs, seeking to identify ones which were both accessible and meaningful.
5. In response, the Committee raised suggestions of alternative groups and organisations the Council might meaningfully engage with in progressing its Business Plan, discussed social prescribing and ways to improve its efficacy, and explored how the benefits of the Council's existing work around Inclusive Economy might be built upon.
6. The Committee makes four recommendations in relation to the draft Business Plan. A number of questions were also raised around the KPIs relating to the Business Plan, which are raised as an issue for Cabinet to consider but without any specific recommendation around them.

Draft Business Plan 2021-22

7. The Committee is strongly supportive of the desired outcome for the Council to have reduced the carbon footprint from its own operations to zero. However, the suggested steps relating to the forthcoming year, Year 2 of the Business Plan, do not appear to draw as fully as possible on the experience and knowledge within the Council. Notably, the Scrutiny function has devoted significant officer and member time to exploring relevant issues and identifying recommendations which would support the Council's aim but they are not included or referenced within the Business Plan actions. The Committee recognises that the responses to the recommendations of the Climate Emergency Review Group are not yet agreed by Cabinet. However, those recommendations with which the Council is in agreement would meaningfully contribute to the Council's wider aspirations around zero carbon. As such, the Committee recommends that the Council aligns the Business Plan with those recommendations of the Climate Emergency Review Group it supports to give a fuller and more complete picture of the actions it intends to take to address carbon emissions.

Recommendation 1: That the Council aligns the Business Plan with those recommendations from Climate Emergency Review Group that it supports (once approved by Cabinet).

8. As is to be expected in a high-level document, the Business Plan covers a lot of issues in a short space of time. To avoid distraction from the key messages of the Business Plan brevity in regards to these issues is therefore necessary. The Committee considers this to be the right approach. However, because it touches on so many issues which are important to residents, some residents may wish to follow up on specific items which they encounter in this document and are of particular relevance to them. In this instance, the use of acronyms and complex concepts and plans without supporting clarification is less helpful. The Committee suggests that the addition of a glossary to explain of acronyms and provide definitions of the technical or complex terms used would be a reasonable step.

Recommendation 2: That the Council includes a glossary of terms and acronyms used in the Business Plan, to include Social Value, OLW, OxLEP, MEEES, Net Zero, ZEZ, Energy Super Hub, and Transport and Productivity Prospectus

9. On page 53 the Council states that 'All new building by developers in Oxford will be significantly more energy efficient – moving towards near-zero or zero carbon standards, with some examples of carbon positive development.' The activity in Year 2 of the Business Plan which will support this is that the Council will 'implement higher environmental standards for residential and non-residential new builds set out in Oxford's Local Plan 2036.' The Committee is unsure whether this action is practicable as a means of achieving its objective, given that it believes the Local Plan 2036 does not include higher environmental standards. It recommends, therefore, that the undertakings in Year 2 of the Business Plan be reviewed to check alignment with the policies of the 2036 Local Plan.

Recommendation 3: That the Council reviews alignment of the actions relating to priority 4 on page 53 with the current Local Plan 2036 policies.

10. The Committee notes the comments made by the Head of Corporate Policy, Partnerships and Communications that the focus of the Business Plan is by necessity focused on transformational activities over those which are business as usual. Waste and recycling is just such a business as usual activity. However, as illustrated by its inclusion as one of the four key themes of the Council's Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change, there exists a pressing need for systemic change to reduce waste and increase recycling, a need which requires going well beyond business as usual. The Committee recommends that the framework for achieving this is through the development of the circular economy, and that the Council includes within its actions steps to foster and broaden a circular economy in its own activity, and within the City as a whole.

Recommendation 4: That the Council includes reference to the circular economy as part of a transformational agenda for waste and resource management.

Key Performance Indicators

11. The Committee does not make any formal recommendations regarding the Key Performance Indicators suggested for the Business Plan. However, it does note a number of issues for Cabinet to consider:
- Although the Council intends to encourage social value in the way it procures products and services there is no social value measure.
 - Some priorities do not currently have targets associated with them. It is noted that a number of these require baselining beforehand, but for those which do not will additional targets be developed?
 - P.60 Outcome 7 There is an apparent disconnect between the outcome sought - working with landlords to improve energy efficiency in privately rented homes – and the target which measures whether it has been met. The latter focuses on safety, and does not reference energy efficiency. Can a suitable target be devised to measure energy efficiency improvements?
 - p.63 Regarding the Council's carbon reduction aspirations that it be consistent with becoming zero carbon by 2030, it is believed that the target of reducing the Council's emissions by 526 tonnes of carbon per year is not sufficient to reach zero carbon by 2030. Can this be checked and amended as required to make it consistent with the Council's zero carbon aspirations?
 - p.64 Regarding the decarbonisation of the City by 2040, the baseline and 5 yearly targets are to be taken from the Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership Carbon Roadmap. This roadmap does not currently exist. How is Council intending to measure against this target given that it doesn't exist yet; how will a measurement method be added retrospectively?
 - p.65 The amount of discretionary funding won by Council is referenced as a KPI, but the measure for that is one which is to be retrospectively provided. Although useful, this is not a target.

Further Consideration

12. The Committee anticipates an update on progress against the 2021/22 Business Plan in the next civic year. In the meantime, the Finance and Performance Panel will hold responsibility for more regular monitoring of performance.

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Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee made on 02/03/2021 concerning the Council Business Plan 2021-22 and Business Plan 2020-21 update report

Response provided by Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Economic Development and Partnerships, Susan Brown

<i>Recommendation</i>	<i>Agree?</i>	<i>Comment</i>
<i>1) That the Council aligns the Business Plan with those recommendations from Climate Emergency Review Group that it supports (once approved by Cabinet).</i>	Yes	Agreed that will need a final review before publication around these issues.
<i>2) That the Council includes a glossary of terms and acronyms used in the Business Plan, to include Social Value, OLW, OxLEP, MEEES, Net Zero, ZEZ, Energy Super Hub, and Transport and Productivity Prospectus</i>	Yes	Will add.
<i>3) That the Council reviews alignment of the actions relating to priority 4 on page 53 with the current Local Plan 2036 policies.</i>		They are already aligned.
<i>4) That the Council includes reference to the circular economy as part of a transformational agenda for waste and resource management.</i>	Yes	We will add a reference.