

To: Cabinet
Date: 12 July 2023
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2022/23 and Safeguarding Policy 2023-26

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	No
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Lucy Pegg, Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities
Corporate Priority:	Support Thriving Communities
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation: That the Cabinet states whether it agrees or disagrees with the recommendations in the body of this report.	

Appendices	
Appendix A	Draft Cabinet response to recommendations of the Scrutiny Committee

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 04 July 2023 to consider a report concerning the Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2022/23 and Safeguarding Policy 2023-26. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 12 July 2023, recommends that Cabinet notes the key achievements of the safeguarding work delivered through Oxford City Council during 2022/23; approves the Safeguarding Policy 2023-26; notes the Safeguarding Action Plan 2023-24; and delegates authority to the Executive Director (Communities and People), in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Safer Communities, to make minor changes to the policy in order to continue its alignment with the Oxfordshire Multi-Agency Safeguarding Arrangements.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Aziz (Cabinet Member for Safer Communities), Peter Matthew (Interim Executive Director (Communities and

People)), Ian Wright (Head of Regulatory Services and Community Safety), Richard Adams (Community Safety Manager) and Laura Jones (Safeguarding Coordinator) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Shaista Aziz, Cabinet Member for Safer Communities introduced the report. The Safeguarding Annual Report 2022/23 set out how Oxford City Council fulfils its statutory safeguarding duties by outlining the multi-agency safeguarding arrangements in Oxfordshire; sharing the results of the safeguarding self-assessment audit 2022; highlighting the key achievements and progress made in relation to the safeguarding work delivered by Oxford City Council; and updating the Council's Action Plan through the identification of areas to strengthen in 2022/23. The report also set out the Council's proposed Safeguarding Policy 2023-26. There were no real shifts in terms of report contents compared with previous years, with the exception that some of the processes and accountability had changed as highlighted in the report.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the alignment of the safeguarding policy with other policies (e.g. whistleblowing policy); the time commitment required by, and support given to, Safeguarding Champions; the content of safeguarding awareness briefings; safeguarding responsibility for specific groups of potentially vulnerable people; staffing and retention within the Council's safeguarding function; how the Council works with voluntary and community groups around safeguarding; the accessibility of the policy; adult exploitation; and the Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation.
5. In particular, the Committee discussed the 60 cases of adult exploitation since the data was recorded centrally referenced in the report and asked for more detail on the situations and assistance provided, as this was useful context. The Committee noted responses to questions that it was very difficult to understand how Oxford compared to other areas, given that adult exploitation was often a 'hidden harm' and it was known that cases were under-reported. However, the Committee agreed that there was data available from other areas and the national picture, even if the issue of adult exploitation was under-reported, and it would be useful to contextualise the section on adult exploitation with more information so that the numbers included in the report told a story, as numbers on their own, without any context, were not useful.

Recommendation 1: That the Council adds context to the section on adult exploitation to give a flavour of the situations and responses; and uses available local, regional and national data to frame the figures so that they tell a story.

6. During further discussion on adult exploitation, the Committee explored whether the Council held any longitudinal information on whether there were any 'repeat victims', which may assist the Council in understanding whether support provided to adults in an exploitative situation positively changed the course of their lives. The Committee noted that the majority of cases were quite recent which limited the ability to undertake a longitudinal study and that victims and survivors tended to move across the country, so it might prove difficult to obtain that sort of data.

However, the Committee agreed that formal data from a longitudinal study would be useful in the future.

Recommendation 2: That the Council undertakes a longitudinal study of victims and survivors of adult exploitation to gain an understanding of the impact that support has in positively changing the course of lives, which is grounded in data.

7. The Committee questioned the Council's processes around working with the voluntary sector and community groups to ensure they have adequate safeguarding policies in place and whether the Council offered any safeguarding training or support to the sector. Through the procurement process, the Council currently asked organisations it bought goods or services from whether they had a safeguarding policy in place; however the challenge was around the Council's ability to check the policy was fit for purpose and take partial responsibility for safeguarding within organisations it funded. When commissioning more specific services, such as youth services, the Council was careful and ensured an adequate safeguarding policy and training, due to the nature of the service and more vulnerable service-users. The Committee noted that this was an area of work which was being actively looked into.

Recommendation 3: That the Council actively works with the voluntary sector and community groups to ensure they have adequate safeguarding policies in place and have access to suitable safeguarding training and support.

8. In discussion around changes to safeguarding procedures, the Committee noted that safeguarding training was provided to Members and Council staff and that attendees were required to complete an evaluation after the session, which was checked and responded to as necessary by the Safeguarding Coordinator. The annual safeguarding questionnaire was also used as a basis to inform training. However, the Committee noted that the safeguarding awareness briefing was not necessarily updated every time the safeguarding procedure changed, which it agreed could lead to a gap in staff knowledge.

Recommendation 4: That the Council clarifies its procedure for reporting back to staff on changes to safeguarding procedures to ensure organisational awareness.

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