

**To:** Council

**Date:** 02 October 2023

**Report of:** Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

**Title of Report:** Scrutiny Committee Update Report

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Council on the activities of the Scrutiny function
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Lucy Pegg, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That Council resolves to note the update report.

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## Introduction

1. This report provides an update on Scrutiny activity during the period from 01 July 2023 to 30 September 2023.
2. During this reporting period the Committee met twice, on 04 July 2023 and 05 September 2023. In addition, there have been four Panel meetings (Housing and Homelessness Panel – 05 July 2023 and 02 August 2023; Finance and Performance Panel – 06 September 2023; Climate and Environment Panel – 12 September 2023) and Companies Scrutiny Panel joined the meeting of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group on 27 July 2023. A summary of each meeting is set out below.

**Scrutiny Committee: 04 July 2023**

3. At its meeting on 04 July 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
  - Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2022/23 and Safeguarding Report 2023-26 (*Cabinet report*)
  - Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledge (*Cabinet report*)
  - Citizen Experience Strategy (*Cabinet report*)
4. The Safeguarding Report was the annual report to Cabinet setting out how Oxford City Council fulfils its statutory safeguarding duty; it also set out the Council's proposed Safeguarding Policy 2023-26. 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. Four recommendations were agreed.
5. The OIEP report set out the OIEP Charter, which sought to bring together employers, business, education, community groups and local government, including Oxford City Council, in the interests of working towards a more inclusive economy across Oxfordshire. In addition, it set out a number of proposed Council pledges to further the aims of the OIEP. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the rationale behind pledge selection; the distribution of proposed Council pledges across the six pledge themes; communications; whether the Council could go further with the pledges; and whether the Council's companies were engaged in the OIEP. Six recommendations were agreed.
6. The Citizen Experience Strategy outlined the approach the Council will be taking to provide a positive experience for all of Oxford's citizens in accessing its services and engaging with it as a provider of them. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to consultation methodology; use of language and terminology; customer satisfaction statistics; how the Council works with partners; managing citizen expectations; digital opportunities and digital exclusion; and the Council's direction of travel in terms of diverting contact online rather than face-to-face or via telephone. Two recommendations were agreed.

### **Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: July 2023**

7. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in July 2023:
  - Draft Carbon Reduction and Sustainable Retrofit Guidance for Historic Buildings Technical Advice Note
  - Biodiversity Update
  - Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2022/23 and Safeguarding Policy 2023-26 (*Cabinet report*)

- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledge (*Cabinet report*)
  - Citizen Experience Strategy (*Cabinet report*)
  - Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families (*Cabinet report*)
  - Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey
8. Of the twenty-six recommendations submitted across the seven reports, twenty-two were agreed, one was agreed in part and three were not agreed.

### **Scrutiny Committee: 01 August 2023**

9. The Scrutiny Committee's meeting scheduled for 01 August 2023 was cancelled due to no business.

### **Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: August 2023**

10. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in August 2023:
- Expansion of the Housing First Programme (*Cabinet report*)
  - Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback
11. Both of the two recommendations submitted across the two reports were agreed.

### **Scrutiny Committee: 05 September 2023**

12. At its meeting on 05 September 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
- Out of Hospital Care Team Provision (*Cabinet report*)
  - Delivery of a New Burial Space (*Cabinet report*)
  - The Leys Pools & Leisure Centre – Youth Hub (*Cabinet report*)
13. The Out of Hospital Care Team Provision report sought approval for the continuation of the Oxfordshire Out of Hospital Care Model. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the cost per person of the Model; whether the Model was due to grow or simply extend in duration; and the potential for continuation of funding. There were no recommendations.
14. The Delivery of a New Burial Space report sought project approval or the delivery of a new publicly accessible greenspace and burial meadow. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the lifespan of the burial site; duration of burial plot leases; equalities impact assessment relating to the impact on certain faith communities; best practice within other local authority burial sites in areas such as Bradford and Birmingham; financial implications; the relationship between the Council and Oxford Direct Services; site design; and information contained in the confidential appendices. One recommendation was agreed.

15. The Leys Pools & Leisure Centre – Youth Hub report sought project approval to create a Youth Hub at Leys Pools & Leisure Centre. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the sustainability of the youth programme given the current financial climate; level of engagement with local schools and other partners; ability of young people from across the City (more broadly than the Leys) to make use of the space; diversity of staff and staff retention; terms and conditions of the funding; range of activities to be delivered; age groups able to access the provision; and the need to ensure young people's access to different learning pathways (e.g. entrepreneurship). One recommendation was agreed.
16. In addition, the Committee agreed the scope for the Budget Review Group for 2023/24, which is broadly similar to that of previous years. Meetings of the Budget Review Group will commence in January 2024.

### **Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: September 2023**

17. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in September 2023:
  - Delivery of a New Burial Space (*Cabinet report*)
  - The Leys Pools & Leisure Centre – Youth Hub (*Cabinet report*)
  - City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration (*Cabinet report*)
  - HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
18. All of the six recommendations submitted across the four reports were agreed.

### **Housing and Homelessness Panel**

19. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met twice during this reporting period, on 05 July 2023 and 02 August 2023.
20. At its meeting on 05 July 2023, the Panel considered three substantive reports:
  - Housing Performance Monitoring
  - Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families (*Cabinet report*)
  - Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey
21. The Housing Performance Monitoring report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to Housing Services for Quarter 4 of the 2022/23 municipal year. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the reasons for the increase in homelessness; why there had been a reduction in arrears given the current financial climate; work to address the number of rough sleepers; placement of rough sleepers in hotel accommodation; recording of the reasons for individuals becoming homeless; and how the Council worked with the private rented sector to help prevent homelessness. There were no recommendations.
22. The Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families report set out the proposed commitment for the Council to resettle a minimum of 8 refugee

families per year for a period of 5 years from 2023 to 2028 – which was determined to be manageable and sustainable, while being consistent with the Council's commitment in previous years. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the rationale behind the commitment to resettle 8 refugee families per year for the next 5 years; whether the Council's commitment could be more ambitious; financial viability of the scheme; placement of families within the City; how the scheme was monitored; the support available to refugee families; and the Council's use of language in relation to individuals and families entering the UK having fled war, conflict and/or persecution. Two recommendations were agreed.

23. The Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey report set out the results of the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey 2022, which had been positive overall but had identified some areas for improvement which the Council would be focusing on – namely communications and repairs. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how the Council planned to address any tenant dissatisfaction highlighted by the results; how the Council prioritised repairs to housing stock; survey methodology; and best practice within the identified areas for improvement. One recommendation was agreed.
24. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in July 2023 (*see paragraphs 7 and 8 above*):
  - Future Resettlement Commitments for New Refugee Families (*Cabinet report*)
  - Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey
25. At its meeting on 02 August 2023, the Panel considered three substantive reports:
  - Expansion of the Housing First Programme (*Cabinet report*)
  - Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback
  - Action Plan Update on the Housing and Homelessness Panel Mini-Review on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment
26. The Expansion of the Housing First Programme report sought Cabinet approval to expand the Housing First programme following the Council's successful bid to the Single Homelessness Accommodation Programme (SHAP). The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the equalities impact and how individuals were prioritised to receive Housing First support; how the Council quality assured the services delivered by the external providers of wraparound support; the distribution of Housing First properties across the City; the impact of the Housing First programme on the availability of housing for other groups (e.g. Care Leavers); the impact of expanding the programme on other wraparound support agencies across the City; how far Housing First would go to address existing need in the City; and the information contained within the risk register. One recommendation was agreed.
27. The Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback was a presentation item updating the Panel on the period from October 2022 to March 2023 and advising that further changes to the management of complaints and feedback were anticipated following the Social Housing (Regulation) Bill receiving Royal Assent on 20 July 2023 to become the Social Housing (Regulation) Act 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the difference between Stage 1 and Stage 2 complaints; tracking and analysis of complaints; and

communication as a vital part of the customer experience. One recommendation was agreed.

28. The Action Plan Update on the Housing and Homelessness Panel Mini-Review on Tenant Involvement and Empowerment report set out an update on progress against the 19 recommendations made by the Panel in 2021/22 following its Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Mini-Review. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the proposed councillor casework system for housing issues; feedback from tenants in relation to prizes and recognition; representation of the views of frailer residents; and the Tenant Ambassador training offer and uptake. There were no recommendations.
29. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in August 2023 (see paragraphs 10 and 11 above):
  - Expansion of the Housing First Programme (*Cabinet report*)
  - Update on Customer Complaints and Feedback

### **Finance and Performance Panel**

30. The Finance and Performance Panel met once during this reporting period, on 06 September 2023.
31. At its meeting on 06 September 2023, the Panel considered three substantive reports:
  - Integrated Performance Report for Q1 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
  - Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23 (*Cabinet report*)
  - Scrutiny Performance Monitoring
32. The Integrated Performance Report for Q1 2023/24 report provided an update on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 30 June 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, the majority of which were submitted for written responses and will be published as a supplement to the notes of the meeting in due course. There were no recommendations.
33. The Treasury Management Annual Report 2022/23 set out the Council's Treasury Management activity and performance for the 2022/23 financial year. The Panel asked a range of questions, the majority of which were submitted for written responses and will be published as a supplement to the notes of the meeting in due course, aside from any information relating to the matters in exempt Appendix 1 to the report. There were no recommendations.
34. The Scrutiny Performance Monitoring report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) for the 2022/23 year and Quarter 1 of 2023/24. The Panel submitted a number of questions for written response at the next meeting. There were no recommendations.

### **Climate and Environment Panel**

35. The Climate and Environment Panel met once during this reporting period, on 12 September 2023.

36. The following reports, considered by the Climate and Environment Panel at its meeting on 27 June 2023, were submitted to Cabinet in July 2023 (see *paragraphs 7 and 8 above*):
- Draft Carbon Reduction and Sustainable Retrofit Guidance for Historic Buildings Technical Advice Note
  - Biodiversity Update [presentation]
37. At its meeting on 12 September 2023, the Panel considered four substantive reports:
- HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
  - City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration (*Cabinet report*)
  - Air Pollution
  - Net Zero Masterplan
38. The HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24 report sought Cabinet approval for HRA energy efficiency projects in 2023/24 and delegated authority to award the necessary contracts. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the Air Source Heat Pump trial undertaken in 2022/23; costings; property types which would benefit from the projects; procurement and value for money; EPCs of the Council's entire property portfolio; and the possibility of the Council benefitting from economies of scale. Two recommendations were agreed.
39. The City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration report sought Cabinet approval for plans for the revocation of the existing 23 Smoke Control Orders covering 48% of the city and the creation of a city-wide Smoke Control Area (SCA) in Oxford to replace them. The Panel asked a range of questions, largely relating to how the Council could best leverage local expertise from the universities in its communications campaign; how clear communications would be managed in relation to moored vessels not being subject to the SCA; and how local tensions might be addressed. Two recommendations were agreed.
40. The Air Pollution item was commissioned by the Panel for the consideration of the Council's Annual Air Quality Status Report and Action Plan; the OxAir Air Quality Sensor recommendations and progress since the report was published; and indoor air pollution. The Panel reviewed a copy of the Annual Air Quality Status Report and received a presentation followed by the opportunity for discussion. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to air quality monitoring stations and data; monitoring of indoor air pollution in commercial kitchens; use of diesel generators by street traders; communications and messaging; the impact of air quality on people; and the use of data as a decision-making tool. Two recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in October 2023 for response.
41. The Net Zero Masterplan set out Oxford City Council's actions over the next two years to achieve its two carbon targets: a Net Zero Estate and Operations by 2030 and a Net Zero City by 2040. This item comprised of a Panel-led discussion on how the Panel might best add value and ensure constructive scrutiny of this standing item going forward. There were no recommendations.
42. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in September 2023 (see *paragraphs 17 and 18 above*):

- HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
- City-wide Smoke Control Area Declaration (*Cabinet report*)

### **Companies Scrutiny Panel**

43. The Companies Scrutiny Panel joined the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) meeting as non-voting members on 27 July 2023 to consider reports relating to OxWED and Oxford Direct Services. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.

<b>Report author</b>	Alice Courtney
Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 529834
e-mail	<a href="mailto:acourtney@oxford.gov.uk">acourtney@oxford.gov.uk</a>