

To: Council

Date: 29 January 2024

Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

Title of Report: Scrutiny Committee Update Report

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

Appendices
None

Introduction

1. This report provides an update on Scrutiny activity during the period from 01 October 2023 to 31 December 2023.
2. During this reporting period the Committee met three times, on 10 October 2023, 06 November 2023 and 04 December 2023. There was also an extraordinary informal remote meeting of the members of the Scrutiny Committee on 16 October 2023. In addition, there have been four Panel meetings (Housing and Homelessness Panel – 05 October 2023 and 05 December 2023; Finance and Performance Panel – 06 December 2023; Climate and Environment Panel – 29 November 2023) and Companies Scrutiny Panel joined three meetings of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group on 25 October 2023, 01 November 2023 and 07 December 2023. A summary of each meeting is set out below.

Scrutiny Committee: 10 October 2023

3. At its meeting on 10 October 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
 - Local Government Association (LGA) Corporate Peer Challenge (*Cabinet report*)
 - Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford (*Cabinet report*)
 - Utilities Procurement 2024-2028 (*Cabinet report*)
4. The LGA Corporate Peer Challenge report provided an update on the key scope and process of the LGA Corporate Peer Challenge, recommendations from the July 2023 Peer Review Team and the outline future Action Plan. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how longer-term recommendations would be addressed more holistically; the language within the report; and clarifying the meaning of a number of the Peer Review Team recommendations. There were no recommendations.
5. The Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford report set out the proposed Implementation Plan for the Council's Electric Vehicle Infrastructure Strategy (OxEVIS) delivery and highlighted national changes regarding responsibility for Electric Vehicle Infrastructure; responsibility had shifted to Tier 1 local authorities (i.e. Oxfordshire County Council). The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to appropriate priority for EV Infrastructure rollout being afforded to deprived urban areas; how affordability and speed of EV charging could be balanced to encourage EV uptake; potential for Oxford Direct Services (ODS) to commercialise pavement cable gulleys; opportunities for the Council to implement dedicated car club charging spaces within Council-owned car parks; how to overcome barriers to installing EV Infrastructure in conservation areas; the impact of parking constraints on onstreet EV charging; and the possibility of the Council introducing a Local Development Order regarding household planning applications to install onstreet EV Infrastructure. Four recommendations were agreed.
6. The Utilities Procurement 2024-2028 report sought delegated authority to approve contracts for gas and electricity and approval to extend the Council's current contract for water utilities; it also set out a proposal to undertake an Energy Procurement Review to inform the Council's longer-term approach from 2027 onwards. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to which buildings the Council was responsible for paying utility bills for; whether the contracts would be for fixed quantities of energy and what flexibility there was; green/renewable energy; and potential for the Council to buy energy in bulk and act as a reseller. There were no recommendations.

Extraordinary Informal Remote Scrutiny Committee: 16 October 2023

7. At the extraordinary informal remote meeting of the members of the Scrutiny Committee on 16 October 2023, two substantive reports were considered:
 - Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document (*Cabinet report*)

- Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule Partial Review for Consultation (*Cabinet report*)
8. The Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document report sought approval of the Oxford Local Plan 2040 Proposed Submission Document for consultation; approval of the statutory supporting information (Sustainability Appraisal, Habitats Regulation Assessment, Infrastructure Development Plan, Equalities Impact Assessment); and delegated authority for the Head of Planning and Regulatory Services to make minor changes in consultation with the Cabinet Member for Planning and Healthier Communities, as detailed in the report. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to site allocation; local and district centres; provision of healthcare infrastructure; pressures on services from other developments outside of the City boundary; collaboration and partnership working during the Plan making process (both in Oxford and neighbouring Districts); viability policies; affordable workspace; First Homes; parking standards; development density; and information contained in the Sustainability Appraisal (Appendix 2 to the report). Eight recommendations were agreed.
 9. The Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Charging Schedule Partial Review for Consultation report sought approval for the Draft CIL Charging Schedule to be published for public consultation. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how Oxford's proposed CIL rates compared to others across the country; the viability evidence used for Oxford; testing of the use class for hotels during the viability study; and dependencies between the CIL Charging Schedule and Local Plan 2040. There were no recommendations.
 10. Agreement was sought from the relevant Cabinet Member that recommendations arising from the two reports would be dealt with in the same way as if they had come from a formal meeting of the Scrutiny Committee.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: October 2023

11. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in October 2023:
 - Air Pollution
 - Delivery of Electric Vehicle Infrastructure for Oxford (*Cabinet report*)
 - Local Plan 2040 Regulation 19 Consultation Document (*Cabinet report*)
12. Of the fourteen recommendations submitted across the three reports, twelve were agreed and two were not agreed.

Scrutiny Committee: 06 November 2023

13. At its meeting on 06 November 2023, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid (*Cabinet report*)
 - Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal (*Cabinet report*)

14. The Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 report highlighted the impact of the Oxford Community Impact Fund and sought agreement to the criteria/weighting for the assessment of the 2024/25 Oxford Community Impact Fund grant applications. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to ensuring the funding continued to work with the Inclusive Economy Plan; how grant applicants aligned with the Council's Safeguarding Policy; leverage between community groups; and breakdown of funding for community groups across the City. Two recommendations were agreed.
15. The FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project Grant Funding Bid report sought project approval for Oxford City Council's involvement in the FutureFit Oxford(shire) Project and delegated authority for the facilitation and delivery of the project. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to matching projects with investors; smarter retrofit work; the Council's proposed role in leading the project consortium; development of a sustainable business model; engagement with colleagues in Planning and Conservation; and other existing initiatives which could support the project. There were no recommendations.
16. The Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal report sought adoption of the Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal and endorsement of the Appraisal document for use in informing development management decisions as part of the evidence base for planning policy decisions. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether the Council had authority for planning applications regarding replacement of certain historical features across the City (e.g. certain stones used on unlisted historic pathways); options for retrofitting modern features (e.g. energy efficient windows) onto historic buildings; and the possibility of encouraging landowners to make private green spaces more accessible to the public. Two recommendations were agreed.
17. In addition, the Committee considered the Oxfordshire Health and Wellbeing Strategy which was out for public consultation until 12 November 2023. A Scrutiny Committee response to the consultation was agreed and submitted ahead of the consultation closing date.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: November 2023

18. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in November 2023:
 - Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary Organisations 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Central (City & University) Conservation Area Appraisal (*Cabinet report*)
19. All of the four recommendations submitted across the two reports were agreed.

Scrutiny Committee: 04 December 2023

20. At its meeting on 04 December 2023, the Committee considered four substantive reports:
 - Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 (*Cabinet report*)

- Equalities Update (*Cabinet report*)
 - Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council (*Cabinet report*)
 - Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
21. The Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 report sought approval of the Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement for publication. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to student numbers and exclusions when calculating those numbers; the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student numbers; scope for the Council to cap the number of students at other educational institutions which are not universities (e.g. sixth forms, language schools, colleges etc.); the monitoring of dwelling permissions versus dwelling completions each year; and heritage assets. One recommendation was agreed.
22. The Equalities Update report sought approval for the publication of the annual Workforce Equality Report 2023, Gender Pay Gap Report, Ethnicity Pay Gap Report and Disability Pay Gap Report; and set out progress on the Workforce Equalities Report and Action Plan. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to minority ethnic group representation within the workforce; number of applications versus appointments of individuals from minority ethnic groups; reflections on whether the workforce reflects the diversity of Oxford's local population; reporting on the sexual orientation pay gap; support for staff identifying as Trans and/or Non-Binary; staff engagement with 'Lunch and Learn' sessions; targets relating to workforce representation; key achievements in relation to Equality, Diversity and Inclusion in the past year; staff recruitment and retention; career trajectories within the Council of individuals from minority ethnic groups; the availability of comparative benchmarking data from other local authorities; Oxford Direct Services' Gender Pay Gap; the definition of the 'Economically Active Population' of Oxford; and ensuring the Council is a welcoming and inclusive workplace. Seven recommendations were agreed.
23. The Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council report set out recommendations over the use of Glyphosate by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) to control weeds on behalf of Oxford City Council. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to aligning the work of ODS and local community groups in terms of weed and plant management; communications; areas of the City which had currently 'opted-out' of Glyphosate application in their areas; the annual timetable for Glyphosate application; where Glyphosate was used to control weeds; and possible alternative options to Glyphosate usage. Four recommendations were agreed.
24. The Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan report outlined the Council's Action Plan in response to the Corporate Peer Review feedback and recommendations received in July 2023. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to prioritisation of actions within the action plan; any challenges foreseen in relation to addressing the Peer Review Team's recommendations; project lifecycles; and working with local anchor institutions to further the aims of the City. One recommendation was agreed.

25. In addition, the Committee considered a report which sought appointment of members and chairs to Scrutiny Standing Panels and Review Groups following changes to the political composition of Oxford City Council. The membership of the Standing Panels is as follows:

Housing and Homelessness Panel (6):	Councillor Diggins (Chair), Councillor Aziz, Councillor Clarkson, Councillor Dunne, Councillor Rawle, Councillor Sandelson
Climate and Environment Panel (6):	Councillor Hollingsworth (Chair), Councillor Aziz, Councillor Dunne, Councillor Fry, Councillor Kerr, Councillor Miles
Finance and Performance Panel (6):	Councillor Fry (Chair), Councillor Corais, Councillor Djafari-Marbini, Councillor Jarvis, Councillor Latif, Cllr Smowton
Companies Scrutiny Panel (4):	Councillor Rowley (Chair), Councillor Miles, Councillor Morris, Councillor Rehman

26. The Committee agreed that the Budget Review Group for 2023/24 would comprise the same membership, including the Chair, as the Finance and Performance Panel – in line with the decision of the Committee earlier in the municipal year.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: December 2023

27. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in December 2023:

- Authority Monitoring Report and Infrastructure Funding Statement 2022/23 (*Cabinet report*)
- Equalities Update (*Cabinet report*)
- Review of Glyphosate Use by Oxford Direct Services to Manage Weeds on Behalf of Oxford City Council (*Cabinet report*)
- Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review: Council Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
- Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)
- City of Sanctuary Accreditation

28. Of the seventeen recommendations submitted across the seven reports, thirteen were agreed and four were not agreed.

Housing and Homelessness Panel

29. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met twice during this reporting period, on 05 October 2023 and 05 December 2023.

30. At its meeting on 05 October 2023, the Panel considered two substantive reports:

- Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
31. The Update on the Housing First Programme in Oxford report was a Scrutiny-commissioned item which provided an update on the Housing First programme in Oxford, including service delivery and outcomes. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to key performance indicators and monitoring; supply of Housing First units; conditions attached to receiving Housing First support; demand for Housing First; thresholds for eviction; and how the two support providers (St Mungo's and A2Dominion) worked together to achieve the best outcomes. There were no recommendations.
 32. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment report provided an update on the Council's self-assessment against the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether the Customer Care and Complaints Manager post had been recruited to; criteria which the Council was not compliant with; analysis of complaint themes; and learning from complaints to inform continuous improvement. There were no recommendations.
 33. At its meeting on 05 December 2023, the Panel considered four substantive reports:
 - Building Safety & Compliance Within Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Stock
 - Housing Performance Monitoring
 - Housing Complaint Handling Performance Q1 & Q2 2023-24
 - City of Sanctuary Accreditation [presentation]
 34. The Building Safety & Compliance Within Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Stock report provided an update on current Building Safety and Compliance performance relating to the Council's Housing Stock. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to tenant communication; response time to issues such as damp and mould; fire safety; lift maintenance; relationship management with internal and external partners in the delivery of building safety and compliance work; and prioritisation of works. There were no recommendations.
 35. 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 2 of the 2023/24 municipal year. There were no recommendations.
 36. The Housing Complaint Handling Performance Q1 & Q2 2023-24 report provided an update on the Council's complaint handling performance in relation to the landlord function for Q1 & Q2 2023/24. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to complaint categories; the nature of complaints against the Council versus Oxford Direct Services; and compensation. There were no recommendations.
 37. The City of Sanctuary Accreditation item was a Scrutiny-commissioned item to consider an update on progress towards the Council obtaining the City of Sanctuary Accreditation; it consisted of a presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to assurance that the spirit of the Accreditation was being embraced Council-wide;

partnership working with Oxfordshire County Council and other institutions; how different groups of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers and their lived experiences fed into this work; advocacy work being undertaken by the Council; how City of Sanctuary work fed into the Council's inclusive economy work; Central Government policy surrounding migrants, refugees and asylum seekers; resource availability; and opportunities for cross-party input into the Accreditation journey. One recommendation was agreed.

38. The following report was submitted to Cabinet in December 2023 (*see paragraphs 27 and 28 above*):

- City of Sanctuary Accreditation

Finance and Performance Panel

39. The Finance and Performance Panel met once during this reporting period, on 06 December 2023.

40. At its meeting on 06 December 2023, the Panel considered six substantive reports:

- Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
- Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)
- Budget 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
- Background and Implications of Local Authority Section 114 Notices
- Acquisition vs Leasing of Properties and the HRA
- Scrutiny Performance Monitoring

41. The Integrated Performance Report for Q2 2023/24 report provided an update on Finance, Risk and Corporate Performance matters as at 30 September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to business rates; specific Council programmes and projects; capital expenditure; Temporary Accommodation costs; announcements made by Central Government in the recent Autumn Statement and their impact on the Council; dividends expected to be paid to the Council by its wholly-owned companies; optimism bias relating to the assumptions within the Budget and Medium Term Financial Plan; and programme and project slippage. Two recommendations were agreed.

42. The Treasury Management Mid-Year Report set out the performance of the Council's Treasury Management function for the six months to 30 September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to changes to the principal value of investments and subsequent impact on the Council; return on investment; whether investments were considered individually or in aggregate within the Council's revenue Budget; and risk profiles. One recommendation was agreed.

43. The Budget 2024/25 report set out a Medium Term Financial Strategy for 2025/26 to 2027/28 and a 2024/25 Budget for consultation. A Budget Review Group has been established to scrutinise the Budget in January 2024, therefore the Panel noted the Budget and agreed to submit a list of written questions to Heads of Service to form part of the discussion for the Budget Review Group meetings. There were no recommendations; any recommendations will be formulated through the Budget Review Group process.

44. The Background and Implications of Local Authority Section 114 Notices report updated the Panel on the background and implications of the series of local authority Section 114 reports which had been issued recently and how Oxford compared to those local authorities and others across the country. The report followed a request made by the Panel at its previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
45. The Acquisition vs Leasing of Properties and the HRA report was a briefing to the Panel following a request for the report made at the previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
46. The Scrutiny Performance Monitoring report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) as at September 2023. The Panel also considered responses to its written questions on the KPIs which were submitted after the previous meeting. There were no recommendations.
47. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in December 2023 (see paragraphs 27 and 28 above):
 - Integrated Performance Report Q2 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Treasury Management Mid-Year Report (*Cabinet report*)

Climate and Environment Panel

48. The Climate and Environment Panel met once during this reporting period, on 29 November 2023.
49. The following report, considered by the Climate and Environment Panel at its meeting on 12 September 2023, was submitted to Cabinet in October 2023 (see paragraphs 11 and 12 above):
 - Air Pollution
50. At its meeting on 29 November 2023, the Panel considered three substantive reports:
 - Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review
 - Retrofit [presentation]
 - Net Zero Masterplan
51. The Biodiversity Action Plan for Oxford City Council Parks and Nature Areas – September 2023 Review report set out progress against the Action Plan since it was published in June 2020, following a review which was undertaken in September 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the actions delivered which had been the most impactful; key areas where the Council still had more work to do; tree planting – specifically planting the right tree in the right place; ensuring the Action Plan was mainstreamed and not seen as an 'add-on'; the client-contractor relationship between the Council and Oxford Direct Services; data accessibility and mapping of sites/projects; and funding opportunities. Four recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in January 2024.

52. The Retrofit item was commissioned by the Panel for an update on the Clean Heat Streets programme and, subject to a successful bid, the Pioneering Places scheme – plus any other relevant updates related to retrofit. The Panel received a presentation followed by the opportunity for discussion. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the technical complexity of retrofit and how it could be demystified to encourage public engagement and uptake; promotion of and response to the Council’s Retrofit campaign; community retrofit schemes; lessons learned from retrofit undertaken by the universities on listed buildings; and use of solar tiles. Three recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in January 2024.
53. 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. There were no recommendations.

Companies Scrutiny Panel

54. The Companies Scrutiny Panel joined three meetings of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) as non-voting members on 25 October 2023, 01 November 2023 and 07 December 2023 to consider reports relating to OxWED, OX Place, Barton Oxford LLP and Oxford Direct Services. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.

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