

To: Cabinet
Date: 24 January 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 for Consultation

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 Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy
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 16 January 2024 to consider a report concerning the Council's Draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 for Consultation. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 24 January 2024, recommends that Cabinet delegates authority to the Head of Corporate Strategy, in consultation with the Leader of the Council, to make any changes to the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 as may be required following its consideration by the Scrutiny Committee and then publish the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 for public consultation.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Brown (Leader of the Council), Caroline Green (Chief Executive), Lucy Cherry (Policy and Partnerships Officer) and Clare Keen (Policy and Partnerships Officer) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council introduced the report. This was a new version of the Council's Corporate Strategy and conversations had been held with a large number of partners and groups across the City to get as broad a range of views as possible. The intention was for the draft document to go out to public consultation to understand whether the Council had the current draft and proposed priorities right and whether the Council's ambitions reflected those of the City and its residents. The priority areas of focus outlined in the document were broadly similar to previous Corporate Strategies, with the main addition being a priority reflecting the efficiency and stability which was the foundation upon which the Council did everything else ('Well Run Council'). To complement the Corporate Strategy there was a separate, but related, piece of work being undertaken across the Council to develop a series of corporate key performance indicators (KPIs) to monitor progress in relation to the Council's priorities.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether the Council's targets around housing were ambitious enough; prioritisation; how the different priorities interconnected; community wealth building; and the Council's work with anchor institutions.
5. In particular, the Committee discussed the prioritisation work being undertaken by the Council following feedback from the recent Local Government Association Corporate Peer Review and wanted to understand how that prioritisation was reflected in the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 compared to the Corporate Strategy 2020-24. While no work had been done to date to consider the changes between the two documents, the Committee was advised that this would likely be a useful exercise.

Recommendation 1: That the Council undertakes a comparative analysis to clearly set out what has changed between the current Corporate Strategy 2020-24 and the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 as a result of prioritisation.

6. The Committee held further discussion relating to the absence of the phrase 'community wealth building' within the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28. While the Committee noted that the intention was to produce a jargon-free document for public consumption, it agreed that the principles of community wealth building were important and encompassed a wide variety of elements. The Committee agreed that, at the very least, language that reflected the principles of community wealth building should be incorporated into the document – and this should include a specific reference to 'shortened supply chains' within the 'Strong, Inclusive Economy' section.

Recommendation 2: That the Council incorporates references to community wealth building, or appropriate alternative language which reflects the principles of community wealth building, within the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28 – to include explicit use of the phrase 'shortened supply chains' within the 'Strong, Inclusive Economy' section.

7. During discussion on the areas of focus set out on the first page of the draft Corporate Strategy 2024-28, the Committee noted that the reference to ‘facilitating more electric vehicle infrastructure’ under the climate action bullet point did not appear to be sufficiently high-level for that part of the document. It transpired that this was a drafting error and the Committee was satisfied that the alternative wording which had been omitted in error was much more suitable and high-level. However, the Committee was of the view that there was not enough emphasis within the ‘Zero Carbon Oxford’ section on working with partners across Oxford – particularly around understanding how different institutions’ decisions in relation to reducing emissions might impact other institutions and serve to just shift emissions from one organisation or area of the City to another. The Committee agreed that the draft strategy would benefit from the inclusion of wording to reflect a commitment to working holistically with partners in the interests of the City as a whole.

Recommendation 3: That the Council includes wording under the priorities within the ‘Zero Carbon Oxford’ section along the lines of ‘working in partnership with other institutions in Oxford to ensure a joined-up approach to tackling emissions’.

8. The Committee held further discussion in relation to the ambition to produce a jargon-free document. While the Committee agreed with the reasoning behind this, in the interests of making the document publicly accessible and digestible, there was some concern that the effort to exclude specific terms could lead to the strategy not actually making any defined commitments. As a compromise, the Committee suggested that the Council could include a glossary within the final document which would help to demystify key terms used within the strategy.

Recommendation 4: That the Council includes a glossary of key terms used throughout the Corporate Strategy 2024-28 in the final document.

9. It was important to the Committee that the priorities set out within the draft strategy were not considered in isolation and that the importance of the interaction and interconnectivity between them was recognised and clearly drawn out. Following discussion, it was noted that this could be done in the foreword of the final document.

Recommendation 5: That the Council draws out and emphasises the interaction and interconnectivity between the priorities of the Corporate Strategy 2024-28 within the foreword of the final document.

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