

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Thursday 11 April 2024



Committee members present:

Councillor Pegg (Chair)	Councillor Altaf-Khan
Councillor Arshad	Councillor Corais
Councillor Douglas	Councillor Fry
Councillor Jarvis	Councillor Smowton

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration and Economy
Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager
Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire
Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer
Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer
Lucy Brown, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council, Leader of the Labour Group, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, Leader of the Council, Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships
Councillor Mark Lygo, Sheriff of Oxford & Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Safer Communities, Cabinet Member for Inclusive and Safer Communities

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Rowley, Diggins and Thomas sent apologies.

97. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

98. Chair's Announcements

None.

99. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 4 March 2024 as a true and accurate record.

The Committee agreed to consider items 7, 8 and 9 next on the agenda, followed by items 5, 6 and 10.

100. Adult Exploitation

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities introduced the report from the Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire which provided an update on the prevalence of adult exploitation and modern slavery and the partnership work being undertaken to address this. He highlighted that in partnership with the other Oxfordshire councils and with funding through the Community Safety Fund from the Office of the Police and Crime Commissioner, the new role of Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire (ASCO) was introduced in January 2022, and that the Council was fortunate to have Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire in post.

He drew the Committee's attention to the central recording system, developed for collection of relevant data that ensured a greater understanding of the prevalence of exploitation and modern slavery, which enabled a focused, targeted approach to support potential victims. He emphasised that the partnership included working with over 50 partners in the city, which included 80 multi-agency meetings and 30 multi-agency joint visits/operations, and the positive outcomes of these were detailed within the report.

Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager, attended the meeting to speak to the item and answered the Committee's questions.

Cllr Mohammad Altaf-Khan joined the meeting.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- Of the brothels issued with Closure Orders, those victims had been offered support and assistance. It was thought that they were now out of that exploitation as their names had not come up as part of the joint work taking place with agencies across Oxfordshire and the wider Thames Valley.
- There was a very low percentage of 'repeat victims'; those who were usually had very complex needs and support would be organised through a multi-agency approach.
- The Council worked with other agencies, such as St Mungo's, to support and engage with particular groups at risk of exploitation.
- The top three areas of exploitation in Oxfordshire, as outlined in the report: sexual, criminal and labour, were in line with the national picture as reported by the National Referral Mechanism (NRM). However, in the city, there was a prevalence of sexual exploitation which was not reflected in the national picture; a targeted piece of work to investigate sexual exploitation and brothels was currently taking place.
- Bespoke training to suit particular audiences, including councillors, was available and could be requested through the Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire.
- Social media campaigns relating to adult exploitation and modern slavery took place over the year as a partnership approach to target specific topics.

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities highlighted the exemplary work taking place across the partnership and wished to personally thank the

Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and the team for their dedication. He suggested that a future report could be submitted to the Committee in twelve months' time to update on progress made; the Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer include this on the longlist of suggestions for 2024/25 for consideration by the new Committee.

The Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire advised all councillors to contact her in the first instance if they had any concerns over individuals in their constituencies or the city; alternatively councillors could contact saferoxford@oxford.gov.uk for the attention of Nicola Bell.

Cllr Tiago Corais joined the meeting.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Council develops and delivers training for all Members related to spotting the signs of adult exploitation and modern slavery and how to report it.
2. That the Council rolls out a social media campaign related to spotting the signs of adult exploitation and modern slavery and how to report it.

Cllr Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Safer and Inclusive Communities, Nicola Bell, Anti-Slavery Coordinator Oxfordshire and Richard Adams, Community Safety Service Manager left the meeting and did not return.

101. Tourism Review Group Update

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships introduced the report which updated the Scrutiny Committee on progress regarding Tourism Management since 2021. She highlighted the impact on tourism in the city since the COVID-19 pandemic and a previous report to the Scrutiny Committee on 08 September 2021 provided some narrative around this. Whilst the number of visits to the city was not back up to pre-pandemic levels, the numbers of domestic visitors to the city had increased, however there were no figures yet available for 2023.

Cllr Brown highlighted the progress made on tourism as part of the Oxfordshire Economic Recovery and Renewal Framework, Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan including work with key partners since the last update to the Scrutiny Committee and these were included in the report. She advised the Committee that the Council was no longer a Board Member of Experience Oxfordshire, following a decision made by Experience Oxfordshire.

Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration & Economy advised of an error within Appendix 1 to the report; the 'agree?' column for recommendation 14 should state 'yes'. She added that, since 2019, the Council had been in the process of facilitating two additional hotels within the city, which had not been included within the report.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- The Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan set out plans for further developing the city to make it more attractive to tourists, which included additional pedestrian areas and better signage.

- Plans within the Oxford Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan would be facilitated by a city centre delivery group made up of key stakeholders including businesses, street specific business groups and key property holders in the city centre.
- Direct city centre toilet provision was available through the Council at Market Street, Gloucester Green and the Town Hall. There were also facilities located at Westgate shopping centre; the owners of which had advised they were happy for these to be promoted with visitors. Carolyn Ploszynski said that she will ask whether an updated list of toilet provision available for public use could be provided to councillors to better direct visitors to the city.
- Whilst it was recognised that there was an issue with coaches travelling into the city, this was primarily the responsibility of Oxfordshire County Council; the City Council had raised the issue with the County Council previously and would continue to do so. The City Council have earmarked £20,000 for a Coach Study which will be commissioned with the county as part of the Central Oxfordshire and Movement Framework.
- Oxfordshire Movement and Place Framework, a joint project led by the County Council, had been set up to seek to create a blueprint for public realm improvements in the city, which included a coach parking strategy.
- The Council was actively exploring the implementation of a tourist tax for the city, which would be available for pre-scrutiny in the usual way.
- The Council would continue discussions with businesses, including tourism businesses, in the city to ensure that they were encouraged to pay and sign-up to the Oxford Living Wage. Over the last four years, the number of Oxford Living Wage employers had risen from approximately 20 to over 100 businesses, but it was recognised that more could be done, especially through the use of the Inclusive Economic Partnership in communicating the message.

The Committee requested that the Scrutiny Officer add tourism to the longlist of suggestions for 2024/25 for consideration by the new Committee.

The Committee noted the report; there were no recommendations.

Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration & Economy left the meeting and did not return.

102. Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, introduced the report which sought Cabinet approval for Oxford City Council's Annual Business Plan Priorities 2024-2025 and provided an update on delivery of the 2023-2024 Business Plan. She highlighted the significant amount of cross-party engagement and consultation in relation to the Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 and the draft Corporate Strategy for 2024-2028 as set out in the report. She advised the Committee that the Annual Business Plan was not hugely different from previous iterations, but it sought to reduce the number of detailed priorities and actions and deliver more measurable objectives following feedback through the recent Local Government Association Peer Review.

Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy added that a progress update on delivery of the 2023-2024 Annual Business Plan was included at Appendix 2.

Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer also attended the meeting to speak to the item and answer the Committee's questions.

Cllr Sandy Douglas arrived at the meeting.

During discussion, the Committee noted the following:

- Local grid capacity had constrained the deliverability of converting homes to electric and installing EV chargers; the Council continued to lobby Central Government to secure new provision to increase the capacity of the National Grid.
- Good progress had been made with Robotic Process Automation (RPA), which was in use across various Council service areas. It was noted that in some areas, the cost of implementing RPA would be too high in relation to the savings that could be realised (e.g. automation of post and scanning).
- The 'Good, Affordable Homes' priority in the 2024-2025 Annual Business Plan did not include any year one actions working specifically towards increasing the number of new homes for social rent because the report aimed to apply a flexibility of terms.
- The Integrated Performance Report would report on progress against the Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 throughout the year.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendation on the report to Cabinet:

1. That the Council includes specific year one actions within the 'Good, Affordable Homes' priority related to driving forward the Council's aim to increase the number of new homes for social rent.

Cllr Susan Brown, Leader of the Council and Cabinet Member for Inclusive Economy and Partnerships, Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy and Clare Keen, Policy and Partnerships Officer left the meeting and did not return.

103. Work Plan and Forward Plan

The Committee noted the Forward Plan.

The Committee reviewed the Work Plan set out in the agenda and confirmed its agreement to consider the following reports at the June meeting:

- Scrutiny Operating Principles 2024/25
- Thriving Communities Strategy Update
- Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024/28

The Scrutiny Officer advised the Committee that any changes to the Forward Plan after this meeting but ahead of the June meeting may result in changes to the Work Plan, and if so, any changes would be agreed by the Scrutiny Officer in consultation with the Chair Elect of the Scrutiny Committee for 2024/25.

104. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report on recommendations.

The Committee noted that on 13 March 2024, Cabinet considered recommendations related to four reports, responses to which were set out in the agenda pack:

- Oxfordshire Food Strategy Action Plan

- Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy
- Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2024/25
- Corporate Key Performance Indicator Review

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Housing and Homelessness Panel had met on 7 March 2024 and considered four substantive items: Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Grant 2024/25; Implementation of Selective Licensing; Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment; and the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey. The Panel held wide-ranging discussion and formulated a number of recommendations to Cabinet on all reports apart from the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that the Climate and Environment Panel had met on 20 March 2024 and considered three substantive items: Tree Planting, Energy Generation/Solar Potential and Council Buildings and a 2023-24 Year in Review item which reflected on the Panel’s work to date. A number of recommendations were made which would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in April 2024.

Cllr James Fry, Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel advised that the Panel had met on 26 March 2024 and considered the Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24. The Panel made two recommendations which would be submitted to the Cabinet meeting in April 2024.

105. Dates of future meetings

The Committee noted the dates of future meetings.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 7.20 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 5 June 2024

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council’s Constitution.