

To: Council

Date: 15 July 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 Katherine Miles, 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 March 2024 to 30 June 2024.
2. During this reporting period the Committee met three times, on 04 March 2024, 11 April 2024 (*informal remote meeting*) and 05 June 2024. In addition, there have been four Panel meetings (Housing and Homelessness Panel – 07 March 2024; Climate and Environment Panel – 20 March 2024 and 11 June 2024; Finance and Performance Panel – 26 March 2024) and Companies Scrutiny Panel joined one meeting of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group on 27 March 2024. A summary of each meeting is set out below.

Scrutiny Committee: 04 March 2024

3. At its meeting on 04 March 2024, the Committee considered three substantive reports:

- Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy (*Cabinet report*)
 - Oxfordshire Food Strategy – City Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
 - Voluntary Adoption of the Socio-economic Duty (*Cabinet report*)
4. The Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy report sought approval for the award of Discretionary Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) on the BMW Mini Plant. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the value of the proposed CIL exemption compared to the overall value of the project; the valuation judgement; the weight afforded to the environmental impact of electric vehicles being made in Oxford versus elsewhere; the likelihood of BMW pursuing the project if the Council did not grant a CIL exemption; subsidies; whether the Council was working with BMW in relation to investment in public electric vehicle infrastructure; similar CIL relief granted by other local authorities; legal risk in relation to equality of treatment of other local employers in relation to CIL exemption; and the positive impacts of the proposed development on the local and regional economy. Three recommendations were agreed.
 5. The Oxfordshire Food Strategy – City Action Plan report sought agreement to the City Food Action Plan. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the variety of fruit and veg available at food larders; the provision of hot meals for elderly residents; the Town Hall policy for leftover food from events; sustainability; deliverability of the Action Plan; and priority areas for activity. Five recommendations were agreed.
 6. The Voluntary Adoption of the Socio-economic Duty report sought adoption of the Socio-economic Duty set out under the Equalities Act 2010, but not enacted in England. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the implementation of the Socio-economic Duty across other local authorities; the Council’s Socio-economic Duty Implementation Plan; and the Council encouraging other partners to adopt the Socio-economic Duty. The Committee also highlighted that the proposal for the Council to implement the Socio-economic Duty had originated from the Child Poverty Review Group, which was commissioned by the Scrutiny Committee, however this was not recognised within the report. There were no recommendations.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: March 2024

7. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in March 2024:
 - Oxfordshire Food Strategy – City Action Plan (*Cabinet report*)
 - Request for Exceptional Circumstances Relief from the Community Infrastructure Levy (*Cabinet report*)
 - Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Corporate Key Performance Indicator Review
8. Of the sixteen recommendations submitted across the four reports, three were agreed, three were agreed in part and three were not agreed.. The relevant

Cabinet Member did not indicate whether or not recommendations were agreed in relation to seven recommendations – providing a written commentary only.

Scrutiny Committee: 11 April 2024 (*informal remote meeting*)

9. At its informal remote meeting on 11 April 2024, the Committee considered three substantive reports:
 - Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Adult Exploitation
 - Tourism Review Group Update
10. The Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 report sought Cabinet agreement of the Annual Business Plan Priorities 2024-25 and set out progress made in delivery against the actions set out in the Annual Business Plan 2023-24. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to local grid constraints and subsequent impact on the deliverability of zero carbon homes; robotic process automation; mid-year progress reporting against the action plan; and the absence of specific actions relating to social rent within the ‘Good, Affordable Homes’ priority. One recommendation was agreed.
11. The Adult Exploitation report provided an update on the prevalence of adult exploitation and modern slavery and the work being undertaken to address it. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the aftermath of brothel closure orders; the prevalence of ‘repeat victims’ of adult exploitation and modern slavery; concerns about particular groups which may be being exploited and work being done to engage with them; how Oxford compared to other areas nationally in terms of types of exploitation and nationalities of those exploited; local trends which did not match national trends; training; and communications. Two recommendations were agreed.
12. The Tourism Review Group Update report provided an update on progress against the recommendations of the Tourism Management Review Group and tourism management activity since 2021. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the vision for Oxford; public toilet provision; tourist coaches; the possible introduction of a tourism tax; and the Oxford Living Wage. There were no recommendations.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: April 2024

13. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in April 2024:
 - Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Adult Exploitation
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Citywide Retrofit Strategy
 - Implementation of Selective Licensing
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
 - Tree Planting

- Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings
- Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)

14. The recommendation submitted in respect of the Oxford City Council Annual Business Plan 2024-2025 report was agreed. Cabinet deferred consideration of the recommendations across the remaining eight reports to its meeting in June 2024 (*see paragraphs 20-23 below*).

Scrutiny Committee 2024/25

15. Since the start of the 2024/25 municipal year up to 30 June 2024, the Scrutiny Committee has met once, on 05 June 2024. At this meeting a new Chair, Cllr Katherine Miles was elected – taking on the role from former Cllr Lucy Pegg. Cllr Tiago Corais was elected Vice-Chair.

16. The Committee agreed to re-establish the following three standing panels from the previous municipal year: Climate and Environment; Finance and Performance; and Housing and Homelessness. The Committee agreed to extend the remit of the Finance and Performance Panel to include scrutiny of executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council, effectively replacing the previous Companies Scrutiny Panel (*which had not met as a standalone Panel since 2022*). The revised arrangements for companies scrutiny are intended to ensure proper, robust and compliant scrutiny arrangements for scrutiny of the Shareholder function.

17. The membership of the standing panels was agreed as follows:

Climate and Environment (4): Cllr Emily Kerr (Chair), Cllr Judith Harley, Cllr Jemima Hunt, Cllr Katherine Miles

Finance and Performance (4): Cllr James Fry (Chair), Cllr Chris Jarvis, Cllr Christopher Smowton, Cllr Ian Yeatman

Housing and Homelessness (6): Cllr Lizzy Diggins (Chair), Cllr Theo Jupp, Cllr Asima Qayyum, Cllr Rosie Rawle, Cllr Anne Stares, Cllr Edward Mundy

18. The Committee also agreed to establish a Budget Review Group for 2024/25, comprising the same membership as the Finance and Performance Panel. A scope for the Budget Review Group will be submitted to a future Committee meeting for approval.

19. At its meeting on 05 June 2024, the Committee agreed its Operating Principles for 2024/25, which are broadly similar to those of previous years. The Committee did not consider any other substantive reports.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: June 2024

20. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in June 2024:

- Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Framework for the Installation of Renewable Technologies for Council Owned Properties (*Cabinet report*)
21. In addition, Cabinet formally responded to Scrutiny recommendations on the following reports, consideration of which was deferred by Cabinet from its meeting on 17 April 2024:
- Adult Exploitation
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Citywide Retrofit Strategy
 - Implementation of Selective Licensing
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
 - Tree Planting
 - Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings
 - Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
22. Of the twenty-seven recommendations submitted across the ten reports, twenty-one were agreed, five were agreed in part and one was not agreed.
23. The recommendation which was not agreed related to the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032, in particular *'That the Council explicitly recognises the need to work in partnership with the County Council and/or Highways on street tree issues and includes a reference to this within the Tree Management Policy 2024-2032'*. The Cabinet response stated that *'The City Council will always work in partnership with relevant statutory undertakers. However, we need to be clear that this policy is focused on trees within the City Council's ownership, and not trees that the County Council is responsible for. There is a danger that a reference to the County Council would confuse this matter'*. While the recommendation was not intended to seek to incorporate County Council responsibilities into a policy which was specific to the City Council, Scrutiny agreed on the importance of partnership working in instances where there was an intersection between City and County Council responsibilities and is pleased that, despite the recommendation not being accepted, the response cites a commitment to working in partnership with relevant organisations – albeit not explicitly referenced within the policy itself.

Housing and Homelessness Panel

24. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met once during this reporting period, on 07 March 2024.
25. At its meeting on 07 March 2024, the Panel considered four substantive items:
- Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Implementation of Selective Licensing
 - Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment
 - Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey 2023

26. The Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Budget 2024/25 report sought approval for the allocation of the Preventing Homelessness Budget and identified Housing Revenue Account funds to commission homelessness services in 2024/25. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to Oxfordshire Homelessness Alliance funding; the lease for Floyds Row; the impact of the services which were due to be cut; women's homelessness provision; the impact of inflationary pressures on the budget and service delivery; the Council's engagement with Central Government to highlight key issues relevant to Homelessness Services; and Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) funding. One recommendation was agreed, which was submitted to Cabinet in March 2024 (*see paragraphs 7 and 8 above*).
27. The Implementation of Selective Licensing report was commissioned by the Panel earlier in the 2023/24 municipal year to provide an update on year one of the Selective Licensing scheme. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the estimates set out in the report; Rent Repayment Orders; plans for communications and engagement campaigns; inspection targets; Selective Licensing fees; evictions; and incentives to landlords to apply for a licence. One recommendation was agreed, which was submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (*see paragraphs 13 and 14 above*).
28. The Housing Ombudsman Complaint Handling Code Self-Assessment report set out the Council's compliance against the criteria within the Housing Ombudsman's Complaint Handling Code. The Panel raised a number of points, including the need to ensure the use of correct language regarding governance and reporting throughout the document; and criteria which were currently marked as 'non-compliant' where the Panel felt the Council could state it was at least partially compliant. One recommendation was agreed, which was submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (*see paragraphs 13 and 14 above*).
29. The Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey 2023 report set out the results of the Tenant Satisfaction (STAR) Survey 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to how Oxford City Council compared with other local authorities; and identification of trends within the survey results. There were no recommendations.

Finance and Performance Panel

30. The Finance and Performance Panel met once during this reporting period, on 26 March 2024.
31. The following report, considered by the Finance and Performance Panel at its meeting on 22 January 2024, was submitted to Cabinet in March 2024 (*see paragraphs 7 and 8 above*):
 - Corporate Key Performance Indicator Review
32. At its meeting on 26 March 2024, the Panel considered four substantive items:
 - Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Scrutiny Performance Monitoring
 - Strategic Review of Services Across Community Services – Draft Terms of Reference

- Strategic Review of Services Provided by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) – Draft Terms of Reference
33. The Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24 set out the Council’s finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 31 December 2023. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to capitalisation of spend on Responsive & Cyclical Repairs; Capital Programme slippage; key performance indicators; budget pressures; and corporate and service area risk. Four recommendations were agreed, which were submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (see *paragraphs 13 and 14 above*).
 34. The Panel considered Key Performance Indicators under the Integrated Performance Report Q3 2023/24 item as they were included in Appendix D to the report. Therefore, there was no discussion on the Scrutiny Performance Monitoring item and there were no recommendations.
 35. The Strategic Review of Services Across Community Services – Draft Terms of Reference item was considered by the Panel in private. The Panel held a wide-ranging discussion and agreed to undertake further Scrutiny of the review process at the appropriate point. There were no recommendations.
 36. The Strategic Review of Services Provided by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) – Draft Terms of Reference item was considered by the Panel in private. The Panel held a wide-ranging discussion and agreed to undertake further Scrutiny of the review process at the appropriate point. There were no recommendations.
 37. The Panel’s meeting scheduled for 06 June 2024 was cancelled due to no business.

Climate and Environment Panel

38. The Climate and Environment Panel met twice during this reporting period, on 20 March 2024 and 11 June 2024.
39. The following reports, considered by the Climate and Environment Panel at its meeting on 27 February 2024, were submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (see *paragraphs 13 and 14 above*):
 - Biodiversity Net Gain
 - Citywide Retrofit Strategy
40. At its meeting on 20 March 2024, the Panel considered three substantive items:
 - Tree Planting [presentation]
 - Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings [presentation]
 - 2023-24 Year in Review
41. The Tree Planting presentation provided an update on tree planting, specifically in relation to the planting of new trees. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the availability of guidance on the process for planting new trees; how various Council strategies and policies aligned and avoided duplication or inconsistencies; the Council’s ‘Treemail’ campaign; urban heat island effect; the costs of planting and maintaining new trees; how the Council could incentivise tree planting; the locations of existing empty tree pits; and the

definition of a tree (i.e. did it includes hedges). Four recommendations were agreed, which were submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (see paragraphs 13 and 14 above).

42. The Energy Generation/Solar Potential on Council Buildings presentation set out an overview of energy generation and solar potential on Council buildings. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to local grid constraints; the optimal scale of solar installations (i.e. a small number of large sites versus a larger number of small sites); the scale of solar potential on Council assets; solar canopies on Park & Rides; and opportunities for innovation. Two recommendations were agreed, which were submitted to Cabinet in April 2024 (see paragraphs 13 and 14 above).
43. The 2023-24 Year in Review item provided an overview of the Panel's work to date and offered an opportunity for the Panel to reflect and consider how it might best add value going forward. There were no recommendations.
44. At its meeting on 11 June 2024, the Panel considered three substantive items:
 - Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Framework for the Installation of Renewable Technologies in Council Owned Properties (*Cabinet report*)
 - HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)
45. The Tree Management Policy 2024-2032 report set out an updated Tree Management Policy which detailed the Council's policy regarding management of its tree stock and sought to align the Council's approach to tree management with current standards and good practice. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to recognising the importance of mature trees; the Council's approach in relation to tree stumps and roots; the intersection between the City Council and County Highways in relation to certain tree-related issues; replacement trees when trees were felled; resourcing, particularly in relation to caring for newly planted trees; street trees; how the policy related to previous recommendations made by the Panel; the Urban Forest Strategy; and monitoring and reporting against the proposed policy. Eight recommendations were agreed, which were submitted to Cabinet in June 2024 (see paragraphs 20-23 above).
46. The Framework for the Installation of Renewable Technologies in Council Owned Properties report sought Cabinet approval to establish a Framework for the provision and installation of renewable technologies to Council owned properties. The aim of the Framework was to ensure efficient procurement processes which remained open and transparent, while enabling the Council to procure quickly. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to whether there was sufficient supply of providers to meet demand; whether local suppliers would be given additional weight within the procurement process; diversity and inclusion; whether establishment of the Framework would cause delay in projects already underway or committed to; whether the Framework's upper ceiling of £30m was accounted for in the Council's budget; how previous Panel recommendations had fed into the Framework proposal; and whether the Council was on track to achieve its target of getting 95% of its housing stock to an EPC C or above by 2030. One recommendation was agreed, which was submitted to Cabinet in June 2024 (see paragraphs 20-23 above).

47. The HRA Energy Efficiency Projects 2024/25 report sought Cabinet approval for HRA Energy Efficiency Projects for the 2024/25 financial year and delegated authority to award the necessary contracts. This report went hand-in-hand with the report outlined at paragraph 46 above. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions related to the Council’s timetable for achieving a full set of EPCs for Council-owned properties; the completion of Equalities Impact Assessments; resident engagement in relation to the installation of energy efficiency measures; budget; whether a risk register existed for this work; and measuring the impact of energy efficiency measures once installed in residents’ homes. There were no recommendations.

Companies Scrutiny Panel

48. The Companies Scrutiny Panel joined the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group (SJVG) meeting as non-voting members on 27 March 2024 to consider reports relating to Barton Oxford LLP and Oxford Direct Services. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.

49. As set out in paragraph 16 above, at its meeting on 05 June 2024 the Scrutiny Committee agreed to extend the remit of the Finance and Performance Panel to include scrutiny of executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council, effectively replacing the previous Companies Scrutiny Panel (*which had not met as a standalone Panel since 2022*). The revised arrangements for companies scrutiny are intended to ensure proper, robust and compliant scrutiny arrangements for scrutiny of the Shareholder function.

50. The Companies Scrutiny Panel has therefore not been re-established for 2024/25, as companies scrutiny will be undertaken by the Finance and Performance Panel going forward.

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