

To: Cabinet
Date: 10 July 2024
Report of: Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-2028

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To present Scrutiny Committee recommendations for Cabinet consideration and decision
Key decision:	Yes
Scrutiny Lead Member:	Councillor Katherine Miles, Scrutiny Committee Chair
Cabinet Member:	Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council
Corporate Priority:	All
Policy Framework:	This is a policy framework document
Recommendation(s): 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 Scrutiny recommendations

Introduction and overview

1. The Scrutiny Committee met on 02 July 2024 to consider a report on the Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-2028. The report, which is due for Cabinet consideration on 10 July 2024, recommends that Cabinet notes the public and stakeholder consultation on the draft Council Strategy 2024-28; agrees the revisions to the draft strategy in response to the consultation; delegates authority to the Head of Corporate Strategy in consultation with the Leader of the Council to make further minor amendments to the draft strategy before adoption; and recommends to Council the adoption of the Council Strategy 2024-2028.
2. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Susan Brown (Leader of the Council), Mish Tullar (Head of Corporate Strategy) and Clare Keen (Policy and Partnerships Officer) for attending the meeting to answer questions.

Summary and recommendations

3. Councillor Susan Brown, Leader of the Council introduced the report. The report provided feedback from the public and stakeholder consultation on the Council Strategy 2024-2028 and sought approval for the draft strategy. The draft strategy built on the existing Council Strategy 2020-24; it incorporated feedback from the Council's recent LGA Peer Review and, where possible and appropriate, feedback from the consultation and previous comments from the Scrutiny Committee in 2023/24 when it reviewed the pre-consultation draft of the strategy. The draft strategy had undergone a great deal of consultation, which had revealed overarching support of the priorities identified in the document. The Committee was advised that the key performance indicators linked to the strategy would be submitted to Cabinet for approval in August 2024.
4. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the fact that a number of key and statutory Council services did not appear to be mentioned in the draft strategy – and whether this was an unintentional omission; which buildings fell into the category of 'other buildings' in relation to the Council's Zero Carbon Oxford priority: 'decarbonising homes and other buildings'; whether consideration had been given to 'Child Friendly City' status in Oxford as part of the strategy development process; the degree to which the Council's zero carbon ambitions were tempered by financial realities; and whether consideration had been given to explicitly referencing 'Vision Zero' (the countywide strategy aimed at eliminating deaths and serious injuries on Oxfordshire's roads by 2050) within the strategy.
5. In particular, the Committee noted that a number of cities billed themselves as 'Child Friendly Cities' and queried whether or not this had been considered for Oxford during the development of the strategy. The Committee was informed that no work had been undertaken in relation to making Oxford a 'Child Friendly City', but work had recently commenced with external partners in relation to making Oxford an 'Age Friendly City'. In discussion, officers advised that many of the elements related to ensuring an 'Age Friendly City' also applied to children and families, therefore the city would become more child friendly as a result of work to make the city age friendly.
6. It was also noted that the unaffordability of housing in Oxford was one of the reasons why the city did not have a large child population, as families were driven out of the city to find more affordable housing. The Committee recognised that 'good, affordable homes' was identified as a priority within the draft strategy and this priority would seek to help children, including children in poverty, across the city by working to ensure the availability of affordable housing in Oxford. The Leader of the Council stated that there was good provision in the city of play parks, leisure centres and affordable leisure options for children and families – albeit in some areas of the city there was not as much play space as the Council would like. In particular, the Leader of the Council acknowledged that there was a lack of children's play space in the city centre. The Committee asked whether this could be addressed via a commitment in the strategy to ensure adequate play space for children across the city – and in particular the city centre, including a specific commitment to including dedicated children's play space in the Broad Street redevelopment. The Committee was

informed that the strategy was not the appropriate place for that level of detail; however, the Leader of the Council confirmed that the comments had been noted.

7. While recognising the other work going on to achieve 'Age Friendly City' status and how this would also lay the foundation for making Oxford more child friendly, the Committee agreed that having an age and child friendly city should be an explicit priority for the Council – which should be articulated within the strategy. This would demonstrate that inclusivity for all ages was at the forefront of the Council's approach. The Committee noted that the detail related to creating an age and child friendly city would not sit in the high-level strategy document, but rather it would likely sit in other supporting strategies, such as Oxford's Economic Strategy, the City Centre Action Plan and the Thriving Communities Strategy.

Recommendation 1: That the Council includes a priority within the strategy to have an age and child friendly city, noting that the detail would sit in other supporting strategies such as Oxford's Economic Strategy, the City Centre Action Plan and the Thriving Communities Strategy, to ensure that inclusivity of all ages is at the forefront of the Council's approach.

8. The Committee noted that the draft strategy referenced child poverty and thriving communities as priority areas. However, it noted that there was not explicit reference to the work of the previous Child Poverty Review Group or the Council's recent adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty. The Committee agreed that explicit reference to these should be included within the strategy to demonstrate the Council's commitment to reducing inequality at every level.

Recommendation 2: That the Council includes specific reference within the strategy to the work of the Child Poverty Review Group and adoption of the Socio-Economic Duty to demonstrate the Council's commitment to working to reduce inequality at every level.

9. During its questioning, the Committee identified that not all activity set out within the strategy was funded; much of it relied on the Council securing additional funding. Given current financial constraints on the Council, the Committee was of the view that the Council's ability to deliver on the entirety of the strategy was therefore somewhat diminished. To assist with expectation management and ensure clarity, the Committee agreed that activity which was funded versus activity which was dependent on securing funding should be more clearly drawn out within the strategy. It was also agreed that there should be specific reference to prioritisation processes for strategy activity that ensured maximum impact given limited resources – to ensure the Council got the greatest value for money.

Recommendation 3: That the Council makes more explicit reference within the strategy to activity which is funded versus activity that is dependent on securing funding; and references prioritisation processes to ensure that activity is undertaken on the basis of having maximum impact when considering cost/benefit and value for money.

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