

To: Council

Date: 07 October 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 2024-28
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 July 2024 to 30 September 2024.
2. During this reporting period the Committee met twice, on 02 July 2024 (*informal remote meeting*) and 03 September 2024. In addition, there have been five Panel meetings (Housing and Homelessness Panel – 03 July 2024; Finance and Performance Panel – 18 July 2024, 27 August 2024 (*extraordinary meeting*) and 04 September 2024; Climate and Environment Panel – 10 September 2024). A summary of each meeting is set out below.

Scrutiny Committee: 02 July 2024 (*informal remote meeting*)

3. At its informal remote meeting on 02 July 2024, the Committee considered four substantive items:

- Citizen Experience Strategy Progress Report (*Cabinet report*)
 - Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-28 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Update of Byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces (*Council report*)
 - Leisure Investment Programme (*Cabinet report*)
4. The Citizen Experience Strategy Progress Report provided a comprehensive update on the delivery of the Citizen Experience (CEX) Strategy. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to digital accessibility and digital exclusion; the Council's face-to-face customer services in the Westgate Library; coordination with partners (e.g. Citizens Advice Oxford) on service delivery and signposting; community outreach work; and the rollout of the Council's online payment system. There were no recommendations.
 5. The Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-28 report sought a Cabinet recommendation to Council for the adoption of the Corporate Strategy 2024-28. 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. Three recommendations were agreed.
 6. The Update of Byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces report sought Council approval of the proposed byelaws for submission to the Secretary of State. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the definition of a bicycle used in the byelaws; whether any conversations had taken place with the universities to influence them to change their policies in parks; concerns over the Council encouraging tree climbing, particularly during nesting season and in relation to public liability; whether there was a trial period for the byelaws once implemented, where revisions could be made if there were any negative repercussions; cycling; and whether the byelaws could include a requirement that boats at Council-owned river moorings must have the equivalent of a vehicle MOT. Two recommendations were agreed.
 7. The Leisure Investment Programme Report sought project approval from Cabinet for the Leisure Management Programme and a Cabinet recommendation to Council for the approval of an additional capital budget of £1.04m, above the £2m already agreed in the capital programme, necessary to deliver the Leisure Investment Programme. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to current usage of the sports hall at the Leys Leisure Centre in the evenings; maintaining adequate access to a variety of leisure facilities; communications with and feedback from residents/user groups on the proposals; provision for emerging sports (e.g. padel and pickleball); accessibility and inclusivity in relation to the athletics club; the proposed new state of the art inflatables included in the plans; and interdependencies between the Leisure Investment Programme and Leys Youth Hub. Two recommendations were agreed.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: July 2024

8. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in July 2024:
 - Oxford City Council Corporate Strategy 2024-28 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Leisure Investment Programme (*Cabinet report*)
 - Update of Byelaws for Parks and Open Spaces (*Council report*)
9. Of the seven recommendations submitted across the three reports, three were agreed and one was agreed in part. The relevant Cabinet Member did not indicate whether or not recommendations were agreed in relation to three recommendations – providing a written commentary only.

Scrutiny Committee: 06 August 2024

10. The Scrutiny Committee meeting scheduled for 06 August 2024 was cancelled due to no business.

Scrutiny Committee: 03 September 2024

11. At its meeting on 03 September 2024, the Committee considered three substantive items:
 - Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledges – Annual Update
 - Safeguarding Annual Report 2023-24
 - Anti-Social Behaviour
12. The OIEP Charter/Pledges – Annual Update report was the first annual report setting out an organisational audit against the OIEP pledges; the report was in response to a recommendation of the Committee in on 04 July 2023 when the OIEP Charter/Pledges was presented prior to Cabinet approval in July 2023. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the use of data to evidence progressing pledges; the importance of disaggregated data in showing progress towards specific pledges; and social value in procurement exercises, particularly in relation to the Oxford Living Wage. Two recommendations were agreed.
13. The Safeguarding Annual Report 2023-24 set out the roles, responsibilities and performance of the Council in relation to its statutory safeguarding obligations. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to housing and homelessness; safeguarding migrants and individuals without right to remain in the UK; the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP); domestic abuse training; adult exploitation; and the identification of vulnerable tenants. There were no recommendations.
14. The Anti-Social Behaviour item was a presentation which provided the Committee with a general overview of Anti-Social Behaviour ahead of undertaking a review of the Council's Anti-Social Behaviour Policy later in 2024/25. The presentation covered topics including: roles, responsibilities, legislation, partnership working and performance/management information. The Committee asked a range of questions, including questions relating to fly-tipping by HMO landlords and students; littering

associated with the closure of recycling facilities; anti-social cycling using illegal e-bikes; enforcement; partnership working; noise nuisance; governance and transparency in relation to which agencies/sub-teams had responsibility for different aspects of anti-social behaviour, including reporting mechanisms; and resourcing. One recommendation was agreed.

Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: September 2024

15. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in September 2024:

- Oxfordshire Inclusive Economy Partnership (OIEP) Charter/Pledges – Annual Update
- Anti-Social Behaviour
- Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-24 (*Cabinet report*)
- Integrated Performance Report Q1 2024/25 (*Cabinet report*)

16. Of the five recommendations submitted across the four reports, three were agreed. The relevant Cabinet Member did not indicate whether or not recommendations were agreed in relation to two recommendations – providing a written commentary only.

Housing and Homelessness Panel

17. The Housing and Homelessness Panel met once during this reporting period, on 03 July 2024. The Housing and Homelessness Panel scheduled for 07 August 2024 was cancelled due to no business.

18. At its meeting on 03 July 2024, the Panel considered four substantive items:

- 2024/25 Capital Programmes (HRA) Delegations (*Cabinet report*)
- Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 (*Cabinet report*)
- Temporary Accommodation Demand and Mitigations (*Cabinet report*)
- Housing Performance Monitoring Q4 2023/24

19. The 2024/25 Capital Programmes (HRA) Delegations report sought Cabinet approval for the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) Capital Programmes for 2024/25. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to prioritisation and delivery of Capital works; the HRA stock condition survey; damp and mould issues; and Energy Performance Certificates (EPCs). There were no recommendations.

20. The Annual Review of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 report provided an update on the progress made in Year 1 of the Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28 and sought Cabinet approval for implementation of the Year 2 action plan. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to review of the action plan in-year; First Homes and affordable homes; the Home Upgrade (HUG2) Grant; Temporary Accommodation; Housing First; the asset management strategy referenced within

the report; and development of the HRA Business Plan. There were no recommendations.

21. The Temporary Accommodation Demand and Mitigations report provided an update on increasing levels of homelessness use of Temporary Accommodation and mitigations in Oxford. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to partnership working between the Council's Housing Services and Anti-Social Behaviour teams; the Council's statutory duties in relation to provision of Temporary Accommodation; long-term rough sleepers; Council housing stock; officer capacity; and the significant costs associated with the increased demand for Temporary Accommodation. There were no recommendations.
22. The Housing Performance Monitoring Q4 2023/24 report set out the Council's performance on a number of key performance indicators (KPIs) relevant to Housing Services for Quarter 4 of the 2023/24 municipal year. There were no recommendations.

Finance and Performance Panel

23. The Finance and Performance Panel met three times during this reporting period, on 18 July 2024, 27 August 2024 (*extraordinary meeting*) and 04 September 2024.
24. At its meeting on 18 July 2024, the Panel considered five substantive items:
 - Strategic Review of Services Across Community Services – Progress Update
 - Strategic Review of Services Provided by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) – Progress Update
 - Comparative Analysis – Capital Slippage
 - Financial Outturn Report 2023/24 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Scrutiny Performance Monitoring
25. The Strategic Review of Services Across Community Services – Progress Update item was considered by the Panel in private. The Panel was disappointed with the limited level of detail included within the report as it did not allow for any scrutiny; particular concerns were raised that a number of key budget savings were proposed which were contingent on the conclusion of the review and these should be subject to adequate scrutiny while proposals were still at the 'options' stage, rather than the Panel being presented with a final report. There were no recommendations, however the Panel requested consideration of an 'options' report related to the review at the appropriate point.
26. The Strategic Review of Services Provided by Oxford Direct Services (ODS) – Progress Update item was considered by the Panel in private. The Panel was disappointed with the limited level of detail included within the report as it did not allow for any scrutiny; particular concerns were raised that a number of key budget savings were proposed which were contingent on the conclusion of the review and these should be subject to adequate scrutiny while proposals were still at the 'options' stage, rather than the Panel being presented with a final report. There were no recommendations, however the Panel requested consideration of an 'options' report related to the review at the appropriate point.

27. The Comparative Analysis – Capital Slippage report had been submitted in response to a previous recommendation of the Panel made in March 2024: *‘That the Council undertakes a comparative analysis of the current overall slippage of the Capital Programme and how that aligns with the 40% optimism bias assumptions included in the MTFP 2024/25 to 2027/28, to understand the extent to which the 40% optimism bias assumptions from 2024/25 are realistic.’* The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the optimism bias assumptions applied to the Capital Programme; risks to Council income as a result of slippage; and the impact of OX Place scheme slippage on the dividend to the Council. There were no recommendations.
28. The Financial Outturn Report 2023/24 provided an update on the Council’s financial outturn for the financial year ending 31 March 2024. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the ODS dividend; additional Council income; Council budget pressures; and the use of Robotic Process Automation (PRA) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in Council services. There were no recommendations.
29. The Scrutiny Performance Monitoring report set out Key Performance Indicator (KPI) data as at March 2024. There were no recommendations.
30. At its extraordinary meeting on 27 August 2024, the Panel considered two substantive items:
 - ODS Group Performance Report (*SJVG report*)
 - ODS Executive Pay and Executive Pay Policy (*SJVG report*)
31. The ODS Group Performance Report provided an end of year summary for the trading period 2023/24, including the expected timeframes for any declaration of dividend and an outline of progress on growing the commercial business (ODSTL). Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report. Two recommendations were agreed, which were considered by SJVG in private on 02 September 2024.
32. The ODS Executive Pay and Executive Pay Policy report provided background information relating to the role of the ODS Remuneration Committee (RemCo) and the recent BDO audit into Executive Pay and sought SJVG agreement for an Executive Team pay increase outside of the Executive Pay Policy to reduce the amount awarded from 6% to 3.4%. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report. Two recommendations were agreed, which were considered by SJVG in private on 02 September 2024.
33. At its meeting on 04 September 2024, the Panel considered three substantive items:
 - Council Strategy 2024-28 Key Performance Indicators (*Cabinet report*)
 - Integrated Performance Report Q1 2024-25 (*Cabinet report*)
 - Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-24 (*Cabinet report*)
34. The Council Strategy 2024-28 Key Performance Indicators report set out the proposed strategic key performance indicators (KPIs) linked to the Council Strategy 2024-28. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to measures which the Council had control versus influence over; the ongoing review of operational Key Performance Indicators; and whether the right measures had been selected as Key Performance Indicators. There were no recommendations.

35. The Integrated Performance Report Q1 2024-25 provided an update on finance, risk and corporate performance matters as at 30 June 2024. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to temporary accommodation demand and mitigations; the overspend on responsive and cyclical repairs; and the housing benefit subsidy. One recommendation was agreed (*see paragraphs 15 and 16 above*).
36. The Treasury Management Annual Report 2023-24 set out the Council's Treasury Management activity and performance for the financial year 2023-24. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to benchmarking against other local authorities; management accounting of interest in relation to Council loans to Council-owned companies and Joint Ventures; and external debt. One recommendation was agreed (*see paragraphs 15 and 16 above*).

Climate and Environment Panel

37. The Climate and Environment Panel met once during this reporting period, on 10 September 2024.
38. At its meeting on 10 September 2024, the Panel considered four substantive items:
 - Net Zero Masterplan
 - Annual Air Quality Status Report
 - Local Area Energy Planning and Mitigation Measures Regarding Local Grid Constraints [presentation]
 - Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership (ZCOP) Expansion
39. 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. The Panel asked a range of questions relating to the actions included on the Net Zero Masterplan. There were no recommendations.
40. The Annual Air Quality Status Report provided an update on air quality in Oxford in the past year. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the anticipated impact on air quality of the reopening of Botley Road; site-specific air quality action plans; future plans for communications campaigns; monitoring and reporting on air quality; Central Government funding; and emissions breakdowns. Four recommendations were agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in October 2024.
41. The Local Area Energy Planning and Mitigation Measures Regarding Local Grid Constraints presentation set out an overview of local area energy planning and mitigation measures regarding local grid constraints. The Panel received the presentation followed by an opportunity for discussion. There were no recommendations.
42. The ZCOP Expansion report set out the work of the ZCOP and ambition of its corporate members to expand focus from a City to an Oxfordshire scale. The Panel asked a range of questions, including questions relating to the goals of other local authorities and members of ZCOP; ensuring that ZCOP membership had representation from the most significant carbon contributors in Oxfordshire; ZCOP membership of organisations outside of Oxfordshire; and ZCOP engagement levels

in different sectors. One recommendation was agreed, which will be submitted to Cabinet in October 2024.

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