



**Cabinet  
Tuesday, 19 July 2022**

**ADDENDA**

**7. Reports from Scrutiny Committees (Pages 1 - 16)**

Two extra reports relating to items for Cabinet decision:

- Voluntary Sector Strategy – Report of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee
- Digital Inclusion Strategy – Report of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee

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## VOLUNTARY SECTOR STRATEGY – REPORT OF THE PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Ian Corkin, Chair of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
19 July 2022

### RECOMMENDATION

1. **The Cabinet is RECOMMENDED to —**

- a) Agree to respond to the recommendations contained in the body of this report:

*Recommendation 1: That the Council undertakes specific additional consultation with smaller voluntary sector groups to ensure its proposals support their needs also.*

*Recommendation 2: That the Council uses the forthcoming work by the consultation and engagement team to seek informed views on children and young people on the draft voluntary sector strategy.*

*Recommendation 3: That the Council assures itself that the draft strategy does not deprioritise the needs of younger people over older people.*

*Recommendation 4: That the Council investigates the reasons behind the difference in spending on commissioned services for adults and young people, and investigates whether the difference in approach means opportunities for better services or value for money are being missed.*

*Recommendation 5: That the Council amends its draft strategy to prevent the impression being given that the needs of children and young people are of lesser priority than older people.*

- b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

### REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that the Cabinet respond to a report submitted to it by Scrutiny within two months of the date of being served this report. The Scrutiny Committee accepts service to mean the date of the Cabinet meeting, and not the publication of the agenda.

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its meeting on 16 June 2022, the Scrutiny Committee considered the Cabinet Strategic Grants Review report.
4. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Mark Lygo, Cabinet portfolio holder for Public Health and Equalities for presenting the report and answering questions, Claire Taylor, Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources for authoring the report and supporting the meeting, Emily Schofield, Interim Head of Strategy, and Karina Russell, Senior Policy Officer, for also supporting the meeting.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Mark Lygo, Cabinet Member for Public Health and Equalities introduced the report. The Council recognised the value of the voluntary and community sector, contributing to society in ways that local government could not. During the pandemic public involvement in volunteering had increased substantially. This has included a new level of engagement and collaboration with the statutory sector. There is considerable ambition within the VCS to retain this new culture to drive efficiency, flexibility, and responsiveness. The Council, likewise, wished to build, develop and foster these relationships and outcomes. The embryo for this strategy was from an LGA peer review in 2019, with work continuing to develop the strategy from then on. In September 2021 the Cabinet approved the development of a VCS strategy, to be co-produced with the sector. The aim was to consider the Council's commitment to the sector, and analyse and align relationships and funding – to create a clear and cohesive strategic approach across Oxfordshire as a whole.
6. Co-production and engagement had been central to the development of the strategy, with the Council going above and beyond what would be expected to garner the views of communities across the county. The Council had also directly engaged the district councils in the county, and via them parish councils also. Five priorities and a number of underpinning commitments were agreed through a VCS and public sector co-production working group, based on the input from an externally-held workshop. The priorities were:
  - (a) Collaboration and Networking
  - (b) Volunteering and Social Action
  - (c) Capacity and Skills
  - (d) Supporting a Sustainable Sector
  - (e) Reducing Inequalities
7. The Council aimed to continue to promote and champion the VCS, strengthen partnership working, work collaboratively with the VCS to address long-term challenges, promote the value of social action and volunteering, upskill volunteers and address barriers to volunteering, help with VCS with access to and understanding of data about local communities, and tackle inequalities, including digital exclusion.

8. In response, the Committee devoted significant discussion to i) hard to reach communities and ways in which their views had been sought, and ii) areas of spending on commissioned services and whether these sums accorded with the Council's priorities. On these issues it makes a total of five recommendations.

### **Hard to Reach Groups**

9. One issue raised over the report by the Committee concerns the preponderance of involvement by bigger voluntary and community sector organisations in the more detailed element of the consultation exercise, the working group. The Committee does understand the reason for this: smaller organisations and individuals do have less spare capacity to dedicate, particularly towards strategic consultation. The point is also noted that a preponderance is not the same as complete uniformity, and that an individual and a number of grassroots organisations were able to participate within the working group. Nevertheless, understanding the reasons for this situation does not alter its consequences. The Committee is concerned that it is precisely those who do not have the time to give up to tell the Council about their needs to support and develop the voluntary and community sector whose voices need to be heard.
10. Three important points were made to the Committee at the meeting and are accepted as potentially contributing towards the lean towards consultation with bigger organisations. The first being that the strategy (and its consultation) were developed not from a pre-existing strategy. With plans and foci adapting during consultation, the approach to consultation may not cohere precisely with what would be deemed optimal when viewed retrospectively. The second being that conversations about developing voluntary sector capacity should clearly involve those with the most ability to contribute and build on any opportunities, which clearly bigger organisations do. The third is that the voluntary and community sector traverses a broad swathe from purely voluntary activity, all the way through to services commissioned by the Council, and that the appropriate stakeholders at each end are different. A large section of those the Council works with directly in the delivery of services are indeed bigger organisations. All three lean towards the involvement of larger groups. The Committee's concern, however, is to ensure that there is sufficient opportunity to hear the voices of those who are most in need or work with those most in need and have little support, that any strategy does not preclude them or overlook opportunities to involve them. The Committee seeks assurance that this is the case.
11. The Committee specifically raised questions over how proactive the Council had been in sharing its survey, the least intensive form of consultation. Notably, it has employed established networks to cascade awareness out. This is fine and proper, particularly as part of the reasons for such networks is to facilitate communication between the Council and groups it does not have regular contact with, but it does not address the challenge of ensuring those who do not participate in established networks are targeted. Social media targeting, for example, allows very tightly defined targeting and was not

undertaken. The Committee would welcome greater engagement with smaller, indeed micro or informal groups, to ensure that a full balance of views are represented.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council undertakes specific additional consultation with smaller voluntary sector groups to ensure its proposals support their needs also.**

12. One particular group the Committee is concerned may not have had sufficient opportunity to share their views is younger people. This is not to say that the Council has not engaged younger people; but there is a recognition that informed consultation requires time and effort to ensure that the issues are understood. The Committee welcomes the news that the consultation and engagement team will be working with young people to ascertain their views on particular topics. The Committee feels this is exactly the type of forum that would allow informed consultation, and would like to see children and young people consulted on the strategy as part of the work undertaken by the consultation and engagement team.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council uses the forthcoming work by the consultation and engagement team to seek informed views on children and young people on the draft voluntary sector strategy.**

**Spending on Commissioned Services**

13. The second issue identified by the Committee shares a similar concern to the previous section, regarding younger people, but expressed within a different context. The report presented to the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee stated that the draft Voluntary and Community Sector Strategy was 'developed with the 2022-2025 Strategic Plan priorities and commitments in mind' and that 'there are strong themes throughout the strategy that build upon the commitments within the priorities to support carers and the social care system, tackle inequalities in Oxfordshire, [and] put action to address climate change at the heart of our work'. Absent from this is any explicit reference to children and young people. A number of other priorities within the Strategic Plan are cited specifically, but not 'opportunities for children and young people to reach their full potential'. This gives the perception that there is a hierarchy of priorities and that opportunities for young people do not fall within the top tier.
14. This concern is backed up by other data. In particular, the draft strategy states that 99% of the Council's VCS spend is on contracts, and within that, 78% is spent on adults, vs 12% for children. That represents a spending ratio of six and half to one. The Committee's view is that many of the issues faced by adult social care around capacity and staffing are felt equally within children's social care, and that the needs of younger people can be just as relevantly met by the voluntary sector as those of adults. As such, a greater equivalence of spend might be expected.
15. A number of factors do, in reality, soften the conclusion that children's services are of less of a priority than adults. For instance, the fact that the strategy seeks to support the voluntary sector as a whole means that it has neither a

children or adults focus. Likewise, the fact that Children's Services were consulted and did not feel the needs of children and young people were being deprioritised. And finally, the relative size of the cohorts in need of social care services may distort the spending figures. Nevertheless, the ease with which that conclusion could be reached means there are a number of questions which would benefit from being addressed prior to endorsement of the strategy.

16. The Committee suggests that it is, first and foremost, necessary to review the strategy and seek assurance that it is, indeed, not weighed against the needs and interests of younger people. The second issue requiring consideration is why such a big disparity between services commissioned to the voluntary sector exists between children and adults' services. On the face of it, two different approaches are being taken, and the Committee feels it necessary that this is looked into to ensure that opportunities to deliver better services or drive greater value for money in one or other service is not currently being overlooked. Finally, on the assumption that the Council is assured that the strategy does not prioritise adults over children and young people, that it re-edits the draft strategy to ensure that this impression is not given.

**Recommendation 3: That the Council assures itself that the draft strategy does not deprioritise the needs of younger people over older people.**

**Recommendation 4: That the Council investigates the reasons behind the difference in spending on commissioned services for adults and young people, and investigates whether the difference in approach means opportunities for better services or value for money are being missed.**

**Recommendation 5: That the Council amends its draft strategy to prevent the impression being given that the needs of children and young people are of lesser priority than older people.**

## **FURTHER CONSIDERATION**

17. The Committee does not intend to revisit this topic again specifically in this municipal year. Members will, however, be reviewing progress against any actions agreed to by Cabinet and the Committee would like to be kept up to date, particularly in relation to the outcomes of recommendation 4.
18. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
19. Under Part 4.2 of the Constitution, the Cabinet Procedure Rules, s 2 (3) iv) the Cabinet will consider any reports from Scrutiny Committees.

20. Technically, a response made by Cabinet at the September meeting would fall one day outside the legal timeframe for making a response. The Committee is happy to accommodate this if necessary.

Annex: Annex 1: Pro forma template for Cabinet response

Background papers: None

Other Documents: None

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# Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma

*Under section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000, Overview and Scrutiny Committees must require the Cabinet or local authority to respond to a report or recommendations made thereto by an Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Such a response must be provided within two months from the date on which it is requested<sup>1</sup> and, if the report or recommendations in questions were published, the response also must be so.*

*This template provides a structure which respondents are encouraged to use. However, respondents are welcome to depart from the suggested structure provided the same information is included in a response. The usual way to publish a response is to include it in the agenda of a meeting of the body to which the report or recommendations were addressed.*

## Issue:

Lead Cabinet Member(s):

Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>

## Response to report:

*Enter text here.*

## Response to recommendations:

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)

<sup>1</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

<sup>2</sup> Date of the meeting at which report/recommendations were received

## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma


# DIGITAL INCLUSION STRATEGY – REPORT OF THE PEOPLE OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

Cllr Ian Corkin, Chair of the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee  
19 July 2022

## RECOMMENDATION

### 1. The Cabinet is **RECOMMENDED** to —

- a) Agree to respond to the recommendations contained in the body of this report:

*Recommendation 1: That the Council approaches Oxfordshire Association for Local Councils to investigate the appetite amongst parish, town, district and city councils on digital inclusion, particularly in relation to access to broadband, online safety and app development.*

*Recommendation 2: That the Council consults directly with businesses, particularly smaller ones, on the barriers they face to ensuring the benefits of the internet are available to them and develops actions to support any new issues identified within the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.*

- b) Agree that relevant officers will continue to update Scrutiny for 12 months on progress made against actions committed to in response to the recommendations, or until they are completed (if earlier).

## REQUIREMENT TO RESPOND

2. In accordance with section 9FE of the Local Government Act 2000 as amended by the Localism Act 2011, the People Overview & Scrutiny Committee requires that the Cabinet respond to a report submitted to it by Scrutiny within two months of the date of being served this report. The Scrutiny Committee accepts service to mean the date of the Cabinet meeting, and not the publication of the agenda.

## INTRODUCTION AND OVERVIEW

3. At its meeting on 16 June 2022, the People Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the draft Digital Inclusion Strategy.
4. The Committee would like to thank Councillor Glynis Phillips, Cabinet portfolio holder for Corporate Services for presenting the report and answering questions, Claire Taylor, Corporate Director for Customers, Organisational Development and Resources for authoring the report and supporting the meeting.

## SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5. Glynis Phillips, Cabinet Member for Corporate Services introduced the report. Digital inclusion was defined as ‘ensuring the benefits of the internet and digital technologies are available to everyone’ and covered both access to the internet and the ability of individuals to use it. The pandemic had reinforced how vital digital services were to everybody’s lives, being fundamental to employment, financial management and social interaction, as well as being more and more relied on for health services also. However, not everybody can or wishes to access or use this technology, meaning an ongoing challenge exists for the Council in how it provides for such people in an increasingly digitally-focused environment. Key groups within this category included, amongst others, those living in rural areas, people living in social deprivation, carers and small businesses. Library and heritage services perform a key function in this regard, providing free access to wifi and computers for users, but also trained staff and volunteers to provide support. Over 8000 applications for services such as blue badges and bus passes had been enabled in this way. The Strategy covered three key areas: digitally inclusive communities, service delivery, and the workplace. Working alongside partners, a digital inclusion charter had been developed and was being consulted on. When agreed, as many organisations as possible would be encouraged to sign up to the principles as possible. Progress against the strategy, via an action plan to deliver the strategy, would be presented annually.
6. In response, the Committee devoted significant discussion to the importance of libraries, particularly exploring alternative ways of further improving their accessibility; issues around rural broadband and the progress of installing full fibre broadband throughout the county; issues around online safety for those not digital natives; the potential impacts of the cost of living crisis on digital inclusion; and the Council’s capacity and strategy to embed digital inclusion as a pan-organisational thread of delivery. Further to these, the Committee discussed and makes two recommendations concerning i) co-working with other councils on digital inclusion, and ii) engagement with businesses. On these issues it makes a total of three recommendations.

### **Co-working with other Councils**

7. As both the breadth of the draft strategy and the conversation held in relation to it illustrate, the causes of digital exclusion are complex, with access to infrastructure, previous opportunities to learn, hardware availability and finances all contributing factors. Another key factor is, however, simply ease of use. It is necessary that for people who may be disinclined to use digital services, that the process is as smooth as possible.
8. The Council has not ignored this fact, and has established a task group to look at the Council’s digital presence. This, however, is a vast topic and it has necessarily meant that the group has had to prioritise its focus; it is presently considering how to make the website more intuitive and user-friendly. The Committee appreciates the need for this, but at the same time it is aware that,

if continued, this prioritisation may mean a window for joint-working with other local councils closes.

9. It was reported that other districts, notably West Oxfordshire, are currently looking at developing apps to access their services. The reason for this is that it is felt that specific apps can be easier to navigate than websites, which makes them more user-friendly and increases their usage. The Committee is of the view that many residents do not perceive a clear distinction between the different tiers of local authority and are far more concerned with getting their issue resolved than who has responsibility for it. This makes a strong case for joint-working on apps with other authorities to deliver an app (or apps) which combine relevant services into a single access point. The reason why apps, plural, is referenced is that it is understood by the Committee that across Oxfordshire, residents do interact with various local authorities for a huge diversity of reasons, and that a single, universal 'Oxfordshire' app would actually be extremely complex and unwieldy, precisely the opposite of its intention.
10. The Council is in a strong position to undertake such cross-working, having signed up to the national Digital Declaration, in which it has undertaken, amongst other things, to 'Try new things, from new digital tools to experiments in collaboration with other organisations' and to 'share knowledge about digital projects where there is an opportunity for potential reuse or collaboration with others.' App development to facilitate easier navigation of the multiple tiers of local authority would fit well within that category. However, the opportunity to show leadership extends beyond this single issue and is relevant to multiple areas of digital inclusion.
11. Reference has been made to the multiple tiers of local authority in Oxfordshire, but only the county, city and district councils have been spoken of. The Committee is aware that there are a large number of parishes, which in some of the market towns are sizeable and offer multiple services to their residents. They are, however, still less likely to have the resource and capability to develop their digital offering. This is an area where the Council could, and should, be taking a lead.
12. On the basis of the above, the Committee does feel that there is mileage and opportunity for collaboration to develop something which would make digital access easier for residents in Oxfordshire. However, it would like a broader discussion with other local authorities on ways in which there could be collaboration to improve digital inclusion more generally. The Committee would like to see the Council investigate that opportunity and suggests as a way forward that parish councils are consulted with via the umbrella organisation, the Oxfordshire Association of Local Councils, and that the districts and other interested potential stakeholders, be canvassed also.

**Recommendation 1: That the Council approaches Oxfordshire Association for Local Councils to investigate the appetite amongst parish, town, district and city councils on digital inclusion, particularly in relation to access to broadband, online safety and app development.**

## Digital Inclusion for Business

13. Although the draft strategy specifically highlights small businesses as a group liable to face digital exclusion, little reference is made to them in the strategy. This compares, for example, with the Glasgow equivalent strategy, *Digital Glasgow*, in which there is a specific workstream dedicated to 'Digital Business', including a specific project to upskill and enable small and micro-businesses to develop their online presence and trade. The Committee's view is that it is extremely important that this is not overlooked. In particular, increasing the viability of small and micro-businesses may well help people who have fewer alternative opportunities to access the other parts of the labour market, for instance those in rural areas with few alternatives around, single parents who need flexibility in their working patterns, or disabled people who find it easier to work in an environment they have set up for their specific needs. Feedback at the meeting suggests that, to date, little consultation has been undertaken directly with small and micro-businesses, and instead has come via district councils. Without good data it is difficult to make an informed decision on the steps necessary to take this issue forward, so the Committee's recommendation is necessarily quite broad, simply highlighting the relative low priority accorded to supporting businesses within the strategy, and seeking that the Council find out directly what the issues are and take them forward accordingly.

**Recommendation 2: That the Council consults directly with businesses, particularly smaller ones, on the barriers they face to ensuring the benefits of the internet are available to them and develops actions to support any new issues identified within the Digital Inclusion Action Plan.**

## FURTHER CONSIDERATION

14. The Committee was offered the opportunity and has agreed that it would like to consider an update on the progress against the Digital Inclusion Action Plan in 12 months time.
15. Under Part 6.2 (13) (a) of the Constitution Scrutiny has the following power: 'Once a Scrutiny Committee has completed its deliberations on any matter a formal report may be prepared on behalf of the Committee and when agreed by them the Proper Officer will normally refer it to the Cabinet for consideration.
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**Lead Cabinet Member(s):**

**Date response requested:<sup>2</sup>**

**Response to report:**

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**Response to recommendations:**

Recommendation	Accepted, rejected or partially accepted	Proposed action (if different to that recommended) and indicative timescale (unless rejected)

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## Overview & Scrutiny Recommendation Response Pro forma
