

To: Council
Date: 28 January 2019
Report of: Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report: Scrutiny briefing

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update Council on the activities of the scrutiny function
Key decision:	No
Corporate Priority:	Strong and Active Communities; An Efficient and effective Council
Policy Framework:	Not applicable
Recommendation: That Council resolves to note the update report.	

Appendices: Appendix 1: Scrutiny work plan – January 2019

Introduction

1. Since my last update, I can report that the No Local Connection Review Group has concluded its review into this important Homelessness Policy, and the Committee has asked for a 6 month update on progress against the agreed recommendations later this year. Starting only this month, the Budget Review Group has been established and made significant progress in its independent review of the City Executive Board's budget proposals. Recommendations will be presented to the City Executive Board on 12 February 2019. The work of the Tourism Management Review Group starts on 21 February 2019, for which a number of external guests have been secured.
2. Looking already to the next Council Year, the Scrutiny Officer will soon be looking to collate a longlist of suggestions from Councillors and Officers for the 2019/20 Scrutiny Work Plan, for the Committee to consider in May/June.

Scrutiny Committee

3. Since my last update, the Scrutiny Committee has held two meetings on 4 December 2018 and 21 January 2019. The following items were considered at these meetings:
 - Impacts of the Westgate Shopping Centre Development

- Quarter 2 Council Performance 2018/19
- Annual Monitoring Report 2017/18
- Housing Panel Report Concerning the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol
- JSSP Regulation 18 Consultation Document

4. At its meeting on 4 December 2018, the Committee considered a report it requested earlier in the year concerning the impact the Westgate Centre redevelopment has had on the City Centre, since it opened one year ago. The Committee's consideration of this issue concerned how the opening of the Centre had affected the local economy, local traders, and the number of visitors to the City. Given the high profile of the redevelopment, the Committee agreed to invite various guests to contribute to the discussion:

- Brendan Hattam, Westgate General Manager
- Sara Fuge, Westgate Development Manager
- Elaine Philip, Markets Manager, Oxford City Council
- Matt Peachey, Economic Development Manager, Oxford City Council
- Graham Jones, Oxford High Street Association and ROX

5. The Committee's discussion focussed on how the uptake of the Oxford Living Wage (OLW) by employers in the Westgate Centre could be improved. This issue remains a priority for the Committee, particularly in light of the recent OLW Review Group which completed its work in March 2018. The Committee has asked for an update on progress against these recommendations for later this year.

6. The Committee made a number of recommendations concerning the promotion of the OLW, and improving our understanding of the wider impacts the Westgate Centre may have had on secondary retail areas. I am pleased to report that a number of the Committee's recommendations were accepted by the City Executive Board.

7. The next Committee meeting will be held on 5 February where it will consider the Council's role in graffiti prevention and removal; an item carried over from last year's Work Plan. It will also consider an annual update on the Council's Corporate Plan, and the Quarter 3 Report on Council performance. The most recent addition to the Committee's Work Plan is Recycling Rates, in which Oxford Direct Services has been invited to present to the Committee on 5 March 2019, following a discussion with members of the Companies Scrutiny Panel.

Housing Panel

8. The Housing Panel has not held any meetings since my last update. The next meeting of the Panel is on 4 March, where it will consider:

- Options for a Council Owned Letting Agency
- A review of the operation of the Severe Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) during Winter 2018/19.
- Quarter 3 Housing Services Performance Report

Finance Panel

9. The Finance Panel met on 6 December, and considered the following items:

- The Budget Review Group Scoping Document

- Achieving Social Value through Procurement report
- Quarter 2 Integrated Finance Report

10. The Panel requested last year to receive a report on how social value could be achieved through the Council's procurement process. Having heard about the practice at other local authorities, the Panel supported the principle of providing a weighting to tender bids which could demonstrate social value. The Panel will be recommending to the City Executive Board that it considers introducing a 5% social values weighting for smaller contracts that are not bound by European regulations.
11. Recommendations will also be made to speed up payments from the Council to smaller businesses and voluntary organisations, and to heighten environmental standards for commissioned works. The Finance Panel's draft report and recommendations will go to the Scrutiny Committee for endorsement first, and subsequently to the City Executive Board.
12. The Finance Panel also met on 16 January to consider the Council Tax Reduction Scheme. The Next meeting of the Finance Panel is on 30 January, where it will consider Council Tax Exemption Monitoring and the Quarter 3 Finance Report.

Companies Panel

13. The Companies Panel met on 12 December, and considered the following items:
 - The Future Strategic Direction of Oxford City Housing Limited
 - The Oxford City Housing Limited (OCHL) Development Programme
14. The Panel heard that changes in Government policy and funding for affordable housing, including the abolition of the Council's Housing Revenue Account borrowing limit, required changes to OCHL's Business Plan. The Panel made two recommendations to the Shareholder Group concerning the reporting of slippage in the 5 year plan, and making clear in financial reports which housing units are intended for direct sale to the Council's Housing Revenue Account. Each of these recommendations were accepted by the Shareholder Group.
15. The Companies Panel's next meeting is on 6 March.

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