

Supplement for

Scrutiny Committee

On **Tuesday 5 October 2021** At **6.00 pm**

Agenda Item 8 - Review Group Scope

Contents

8. **Review Group Scope**

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Attached is the draft scope for Scrutiny's chosen Review Group topic, child poverty. The Committee is asked to agree the scope and make a number of other practical arrangements.

The agenda, reports and any additional supplements can be found together with this supplement on the committee meeting webpage.

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To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 6 October 2021
Report of: Susan Sale, Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Child Poverty Review Group

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update the Committee on the status of the Review Group and make arrangements for the next stages
Corporate Priority:	Safe, Healthy Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation(s): That the Committee resolves to:	
1. Agree the draft scope, having made any necessary amendments	
2. Agree to invite the County Council to undertake a joint Review Group	
3. Agree the membership level and accept the nominations for membership	
4. Agree a Chair (or lead member) for the Review Group	
5. Note that further amendments may be required in the event of a joint review, and agree that such changes be delegated to the Chair in discussion with the Scrutiny Officer	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Review Group scope

Introduction and Background

1. Each year the Scrutiny Committee undertakes a 'deep dive' into a topic of particular concern to its members over a course of multiple meetings through a Review Group. At its August 2021 meeting it was agreed that the topic for Review Group for the current civic year would be Child Poverty.

Agreeing the Draft Scope

2. Attached to this report is a draft scope for this Review Group, which seeks to clarify what the Review Group seeks to achieve and how it aims to do so. Although

participation in a Review Group does not require a member to be part of the Scrutiny function, Scrutiny nonetheless 'owns' the Review Group and its final report and recommendations to Cabinet. As such, the Committee is asked to review the draft Review Group Scope attached as Appendix 1 to ensure that what is proposed will deliver the outcomes wanted by the Committee from the Review Group.

3. The Committee should be aware that members of the Review Group are also given an opportunity to shape the scope, meaning that what is agreed may be modified slightly. This is for a number of reasons. Review Group members may not be on Scrutiny but are expected to have areas of particular interest and/or knowledge, so it is important that they are given the opportunity to contribute towards the shape of the work they will be undertaking. Likewise, the scope does seek to agree some practical specifics, such as meeting timings, which are more pertinent to Review Group members than the wider Scrutiny Committee. Changes are expected to be fairly small.

Potential Involvement of the County Council

4. Because Review Groups afford more time and resource to look at a topic, oftentimes the topic looked at is fairly big, with multiple stakeholders being responsible for different areas. This is not a problem; one way to cut a big topic down to a manageable size is to focus on the elements which are within the sole or significant control of the City Council. Recent Review Groups have, for example, looked at topics including the Climate Emergency and Domestic Abuse and have followed exactly this approach. Doing so has the benefit that the issues looked at, and therefore the recommendations made, are within the purview of the City Council, meaning the Review Group's work is more likely to lead to concrete change.
5. The topic chosen for this Review Group, child poverty, is similarly wide-ranging, and is one where the City Council does not necessarily control the primary levers for change. It could, as previously, take the approach of focusing on its own sphere of activity and influence. An alternative, however, would be to work with other stakeholders to undertake a joint review, in the hope of providing a coordinated response with those who do control the primary levers. In this case, the most obvious candidate would be the County Council, who hold responsibility for a number of pertinent areas including education, safeguarding and public health. With the recent change of administration at the County Council, the barriers to fruitful joint-working may be reduced. Very preliminary discussions with officers at the County Council have met with positive responses, though no agreement has been reached. The Committee is asked whether it wishes to pursue this idea further.
6. A joint review with the County Council would have impacts on the details of the scope. Consequently, the scope has been colour-coded to indicate what might happen with a City-Council only Review Group, and what with a County Council one. The Committee is asked to note that should it wish to undertake a joint Review Group further changes may be requested by the County Council members and to agree that the decision whether to agree to these suggestions should be delegated to the Chair of the Review Group and the Scrutiny Officer.

Appointment of Members and Chair

7. The rules around membership of Review Groups are governed by the Scrutiny Operating Principles agreed by the Committee at the start of the civic year, which now form Annex 1 to Part 8 of the Council's Constitution.
8. Historically, Review Groups have tended to have a membership of six, which has worked well to balance the need to have a broad range of perspectives with enough time for each member to explore fully the issues before them. Fewer than six and issues around a quorum become more pressing, as substitutes are not permitted. It is therefore recommended that the Review Group have six members.
9. The recommendation above, however, is clouded slightly by the possibility of doing a joint Review Group with the County Council. If the City and the County were both to have six members the group would be unwieldy and there would be insufficient time for individual members to explore the issues and bring their own experience and knowledge to bear. Should there be a joint Review Group, it is recommended that number be cut to four. The Committee is asked to accept the nominations by political groups for both those eventualities.
10. Under the Scrutiny Operating Principles agreed, membership of Review Groups is cross-party with the following break-downs:

4 Members	6 Members
2 Labour	3 Labour
1 Liberal Democrat	2 Liberal Democrat
1 Green	1 Green

11. Members of Review Groups may be any non-executive member; they are not required to be members of the Scrutiny Committee or any of its Panels. Though not a requirement, in the event that a joint Review were to be undertaken it would be preferable from a perspective of clarity over who an individual is representing if they are not simultaneously a City and County Councillor.
12. Though Review Group membership is not required to be drawn from the Scrutiny Committee, the importance of the Chair's role as a bridge between the Review Group and the Committee means that it is preferable that they be a member of the Scrutiny Committee. It should be noted that should a joint Review be undertaken there is the possibility that the County Council may wish the Chair to come from its membership. In this case, the person appointed Chair by the Committee will retain the Review Group – Scrutiny communication role.
13. An issue to bring to the Committee's attention is that the meetings are scheduled for earlier than is usually the case, 5pm rather than 6pm. This is on the back of feedback from prospective members, who have expressed a wish to begin earlier. As referenced above, the timings of meetings are not set in stone but potential members should at least note the possibility that meetings will be earlier than usual.

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Child Poverty Review Group

This scoping template is designed to assist councillors and officers in establishing the focus of a scrutiny Review Group. Specifically, the scoping template emphasises the need for scrutiny Review Groups to have a clear purpose, rationale and focus for their work, and to make the best use of the resources available within a given time frame. This document will act as a reference guide throughout the review process to ensure the review remains focused on its intended purpose.

Green type highlights areas that would be expected to be of greater relevance in the event of a joint Review Group with the County Council.

Review Topic	Child Poverty Review Group
Chair / lead member	TBC
Review Group Members	<p>Six members (3 Labour, 2 Lib Dem, 1 Green) for a City Council only Review Group</p> <p>Eight to ten members (4 City Council – 2 Labour, 1 Lib Dem, 1 Green) for a joint Review Group with the County Council</p> <p>Members TBC</p>
Officer support and allocated hours	The Scrutiny Officer will support the Review Group around existing committee and panel commitments. Approximately 10 hours a week will be dedicated to producing meeting notes, agendas, organising guests, research and drafting reports. Council officers from elsewhere in the council will also be required to provide technical advice, though their capacity to support the review may be limited among other commitments.
Background and rationale	<p>Even prior to the pandemic, child poverty in the UK was highly prevalent, with the Department for Work and Pensions estimating that 4.1 million children were living in poverty (where family disposable income is below 60% of the relevant median income), or nine children in every classroom of 30 in the year 2019/20.¹</p> <p>The negative outcomes on a child of growing up in poverty are extraordinarily pervasive, with consequences that track through on to adulthood as just a small set of the possible examples illustrate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Individuals who had been eligible for free school meals, eleven years after completing key stage four, are three times as likely to be claiming out of work benefits than those not eligible for free school meals.²

¹ Households Below Average Income, Statistics on the number and people living in low income households for financial years 1994/95 to 2019/20, Table 4.3tr and 4_5b. Department for Work and Pensions, 2021

²https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/730977/FSM_and_SEND_outcomes-statistics.pdf

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Birthweights in the most deprived areas are on average 200g lower than in the richest, and children in disadvantaged families are more likely to die suddenly in infancy.³ - Children from families living in poverty are 3 times more likely, on average, to suffer from psychiatric conditions, such as ADHD, oppositional defiant disorder (ODD), depression, anxiety, and poor coping skills.⁴ - Children from families who remain in the least affluent fifth of society are seven times more likely to harm themselves and 13 times more likely to commit violent crime as young adults.⁵ <p>Focus on long term consequences overlooks, however, the immediate unhappiness and suffering for children with insufficient heating, the miserableness of malnutrition, the embarrassment of ill-fitting or old uniforms, or the exclusion of being unable to afford to participate in the same activities as their peers.</p> <p>The unevenness of the experience of child poverty amongst different demographic groups means concerns over child poverty have a strong cross-over with equalities concerns. Almost half of one parent families (overwhelmingly the mother) have children in poverty. Likewise, children from BAME parents are almost twice as likely to be living in poverty than white children.⁶</p> <p>Oxford, though prosperous and having high employment, is not immune to child poverty. Work is insufficient to prevent poverty, with 75% of children in poverty living in a home where at least one parent is in employment. Oxford's regular appearance near the top of lists for housing unaffordability means families face high costs of living. Oxford's figure runs at only very slightly below the national average, with 29% of children in Oxford live below the poverty line and six neighbourhoods experiencing rates of over 30%.⁷ As such, its children and young people face the same immediate distress and long term consequences as elsewhere in the country.</p> <p>This Review is particularly timely as many families face a cost-of-living crisis arising from multiple sources. Financial support for families hit by Covid-19, such as the £20 per week uplift in Universal Credit, the furlough scheme and support for the self-employed have, or are due to be removed. All the while, the CPIH rate of inflation for August 2021 was 3%, with expectations of the rate moving higher still in at least the</p>
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³ <https://www.rcpch.ac.uk/news-events/news/impact-poverty-child-health>

⁴ https://bcmj.org/sites/default/files/public/BCMJ_Vol58_No8_Children-mental-health-poverty%20%28ID%20106172%29.pdf

⁵ <https://www.localgov.co.uk/Poverty-can-lead-to-self-harm-and-violent-crime-study-shows/46176> NB - data taken from Denmark

⁶ https://cpag.org.uk/child-poverty/child-poverty-facts-and-figures#footnoteref1_wx4jkbz

⁷ https://www.oxford.gov.uk/info/20131/population/497/poverty_and_deprivation Figures for 2019.

	<p>short term. Of particular concern is the rise in gas prices to four times their recent average. Whilst the government price cap on energy prices insulates consumers from this rise to a degree, the price cap was recently increased by a record amount, a decision made before the recent spate of bankruptcies amongst energy firms, which indicates a high possibility of high rises in the future. Policy changes will also make finances more difficult for working families, with the government's Social Care bill passing the commons which, if unamended, will levy an additional 1.25% on national insurance contributions. This is a tax with a lower threshold for payment than income tax, meaning the impact will be felt more heavily by those on lower incomes. With these changes, people at the lower end of the income spectrum are expected, in light of what is a looming cost of living crisis, to face real challenge, with child poverty and its negative consequences rising as a result.</p>
Purpose of Review / Objective	<p>The Review Group recognises that child poverty has extremely broad effects, with multiple stakeholders holding responsibility for addressing different issues. To seek not to lose the central importance of the child, the substantive parts of the Review Group will be dedicated to exploring the challenges faced by children from low-income householders in different key contexts: at home, at school and at play. To ensure the greatest impact of the review, the Review Group seeks to focus on exploring the opportunities for the City and County Council to contribute towards mitigating the consequences of and reducing the incidence of child poverty locally. It is hoped that by undertaking a review jointly with the County Council that greater shared understanding may be developed of how more coordinated activity to do so could occur.</p>
Indicators of Success	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. A clear understanding is gained of the opportunities for the City and County Council(s) to mitigate and reduce child poverty and its impacts locally and recommendations formulated to do so 2. The majority of recommendations are agreed and implemented 3. A strong evidence base is produced to support the need and practicability of recommendations. 4. Closer working relationships are fostered between the City and County Councils
Out of scope	<p>Recommendations made to stakeholders not directly involved in the Review Group.</p>
Methodology/ Approach	<p>The Review Group will consider evidence to inform the consideration of its key issues. Evidence gathering is expected to include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Inviting written and / or verbal evidence from Council officers, key stakeholders, and expert witnesses. Reservations are held about inviting those with lived (particularly current) experience of poverty in case it inadvertently 'others' contributors or causes them embarrassment. - Considering what can be learnt from other local authorities - Desk research

Witnesses/ Experts	<p>The following Oxford City Council members and officers are anticipated to be invited to participate:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford - Housing officers - Licensing Officers - Communities team officers – localities, grants, and Youth Ambition - Economic Development officers - Revenues and Benefits and Welfare Reform team officers <p>External invitees invited to contribute may include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - County Council representatives from Public Health, Children’s Social Care, Schools, Community Transport, Surestart and the Local Economic Partnership - Foodbank providers, such as Oxford Mutual Aid and SOFEA - Tenant and work unions, such as Acorn, Oxford Tenants Union, the GMB - Benefits and advice providers, such as the Citizens’ Advice Bureau, Rose Hill Advice Centre and Agna Smith Advice Centre - OCVA - Youth club representatives from the Lees, Barton or Rose Hill - Head teachers from schools in low-income areas and college heads - Children’s Charities such as Child Poverty Action Group, The Children’s Society, End Child Poverty Coalition, Oxford and District Action on Child Poverty - Oxford University Department of Social Policy and Intervention (Fran Bennett) 		
Specify Site Visits	None		
Projected start date	Week commencing 25 October	Draft Report Deadline	Submission to Scrutiny for 07 March 2022 meeting
Meeting Frequency	As organised	Projected completion date	Submission to Cabinet for 16 March 2022 meeting

Draft outline of meetings

(All meetings to take place via Zoom. Timings would preferably be to start earlier than 6pm)

Meeting one: Scoping (Between 25-28 October 2021)

The Review Group will finesse its draft proposal having discussed it internally, with Council officers and relevant Cabinet members.

Meeting two: Introduction to Child Poverty (Between 15-22 November 2021)

The Review Group will consider a presentation/report on:

- What is child poverty?
- How is it measured
- What are the primary causes (including the impact of the pandemic)?
- Profiling child poverty in Oxford/Oxfordshire
- What are the impacts of child poverty? Why does it matter?
- Who are the key stakeholders and what do they do?

Meeting three: The Child at Home (Between 30 November – 02 December 2021)

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- Home suitability - the prevalence of long-term 'temporary' accommodation and overcrowding
- Fuel poverty and the Council's retrofitting programme
- Access to food, including the work of foodbanks
- The activity of the Licensing Team in overseeing minimum standards of rental accommodation – currently with HMOs and soon with Selective Licensing
- Are there safeguards and minimum standards for houses which are paid for through UC or HB, particularly in the private rented sector?
- **Statutory support for children at risk of harm, its remit and limitations**

Meeting four: The Child at School and the Child at Play (Between 14 – 16 December 2021)

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- The impact of child poverty on educational attainment
- **Support at school for children from low-income families, including how the premium for children on free school meals is typically spent by schools**
- Council grant funding of both educational and after-school activities and the availability, and the Youth Ambition programme
- Teens –the specific support they require, and the opportunities and barriers to apprenticeships or university
- What are the opportunities for children to participate in free/low cost leisure activities in the areas of the City where child poverty is most prevalent?
- **Is transport availability/cost a barrier to engagement? How commonly do community transport initiatives provide for low income families?**
- What opportunities are being offered at the Council's Community Centres and how does the Council encourage provision of affordable activities there?

Meeting five: Supporting Parents (Between 20 – 23 December 2021)

The Review Group will hear from relevant officers and external witnesses to consider the following:

- Support for those parents with higher prevalence of low incomes (possibly

single parents, disabled people, those who do not speak English and/or are new immigrants, ex-offenders, drug or alcohol abusers)

- Whether there is additional support for new parents on low incomes and its adequacy
- Challenges to accessing the right benefits
- The anticipated impact of removing the additional Covid-related benefits and supports
- **The role of the LEP in developing higher paying jobs**
- Whether the Council's 'Inclusive Economy' aspirations and actions sufficiently cater to the needs of single parents
- Ways to improve the take-up of commitments to pay the Oxford Living Wage
- Childcare options for those on low incomes
- Housing/rent costs

This meeting will also be an opportunity to catch up on with any issues/speakers delayed from previous meetings.

Meeting six: Strategic Coordination and Recommendation Forming (17, 19 or 20 January 2022)

The Review Group will discuss whether existing structures are sufficient to coordinate work between stakeholders.

Test initial draft recommendations with officers and relevant Cabinet members and form agreed draft recommendations

Meeting seven: Agreement of Final Report (21 - 23 February 2022)

The Review Group will review the draft report provided by the Scrutiny Officer, and identify changes needed prior to submission to Scrutiny on 07 March 2022, and Cabinet on 16 March 2022.