

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 8 June 2021

Committee members present:

Councillor Bely-Summers (for Councillor Dunne)

Councillor Corais

Councillor Fry

Councillor Snowton

Councillor Tidball

Councillor Waite

Councillor Chapman

Councillor Djafari-Marbini

Councillor Linda Smith

Councillor Thomas

Councillor Wade

Councillor Wolff

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Emma Griffiths, Lawyer

Daniella Granito, Policy and Partnerships Manager; Safeguarding co-ordinator

Laura Jones, Safeguarding Coordinator

Nerys Parry, Housing Strategy & Needs Manager

Emma Gubbins

Elaine Philip, Markets Manager

Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer

John Mitchell, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthier Oxford, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthier Oxford

Apologies:

Councillors Dunne sent apologies.

1. Election of Chair for the Council Year 2021-22

The Committee resolved to elect Cllr Wade as Chair for the Council year 2021/22.

2. Election of Vice Chair for the Council Year 2021-22

The Committee resolved to elect Cllr Chapman as Vice-Chair for the Council Year 2021/22.

3. Declarations of interest

None.

4. Chair's Announcements

The Chair welcomed Members to the first meeting of the Committee in the new Council year. With its mix of experienced and new Members it would be a powerful Committee which would be well placed to make strong representations.

5. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the meeting held on 02 March 2021 as a true and accurate record.

6. Work Plan & Forward Plan

The Committee agreed to note the Forward Plan, leaving discussion of the Work Plan to the following item.

7. Scrutiny Operating Principles & Standing Panel Arrangements

The Chair noted that it was proposed to adopt the operating principles which had been used previously and as set out in Appendix One of the report.

The Scrutiny Officer explained that the number of review groups and standing panels was necessarily constrained. The proposal before the Committee for the three standing panels and two review groups could be amended but only if an increase in one was compensated for by a reduction in the other.

In relation to the proposed co-option of a tenant to the Housing & Homelessness Panel, it was suggested that there would be merit in a more flexible arrangement for the engagement of the homeless community. It was emphasised that this was not a reflection on the individual proposed but simply a wish to ensure that the Panel benefitted from a wider range of views from that community. The Committee agreed to defer this decision to the Housing and Homelessness Panel.

The wording of recommendation 3e was in need of clarification. The Scrutiny Officer noted that this wording was drawn from the Constitution and this would be addressed by an amendment to it in due course.

It was noted that the Budget Review Group's work was particularly intense and demanding and that the previous practice of having a membership of 4 rather than the 6 (as proposed for the Panels) was likely to be preferable. The Scrutiny Officer said a decision about the arrangements for that group, which was separate from the Finance and Performance Panel, would not have to be made until the Autumn.

In relation to scrutiny of the Council's companies, new overall governance arrangements for the companies were being developed. In the absence of those details it was agreed that the Committee should proceed with the establishment of its Companies Scrutiny Panel in the usual way. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to bring the matter of the new governance arrangements to the July meeting to give the Committee an opportunity to comment on them if it wished to do so.

The Scrutiny Officer alerted the Committee to two proposed/likely changes to the schedule of meetings: Companies Panel on 21 June was unlikely to go ahead on that day. The Housing & Homelessness Panel on 05 July conflicted with an all Member event and he would liaise with the Chair of that Panel to find an alternative date.

The Committee agreed to appoint the following as Chairs to the three Panels

- Housing & Homelessness: Cllr Smith
- Finance & Performance: Cllr Fry
- Companies Scrutiny: Cllr Chapman

The Scrutiny Officer set out the proposal for a more flexible approach to the Committee's Work Plan which would enable a more responsive approach to variations in the Cabinet Forward Plan. At the heart of the proposal was the prioritisation of anticipated Cabinet reports for Scrutiny consideration.

It was agreed that that the opportunity to contribute the Committee's views prior to completion of Cabinet reports (as well as after) would sometimes be valuable. The report going to Cabinet in July on the Electric Vehicle (EV) Strategy was given as an example and the desirability of ensuring that full account was taken of the need of that strategy to embrace the needs of disabled users and lower income families who would have less easy access to charging points outside their homes. The Scrutiny Officer agreed that the Committee could, with reference to the Forward Plan, make such *informal* contributions to future Cabinet reports if it wished. The Committee agreed that the Scrutiny Officer should pass on the comments raised in relation to the EV strategy.

The Committee noted the importance of taking proper account of equality and diversity in the Council's work and that this should be reflected in the Committee's work programme in a suitable way. The Scrutiny Officer agreed to follow up the suggestion with Cllr Tidball with a view to bringing a proposal to the following meeting.

In response to the recommendations given in the covering report, the Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree** the proposed Committee Operating Principles as set out in Appendix 1 but for an amended version to be brought back before the Committee for agreement to elucidate the Committee's commitment to scrutinising diversity issues at the next meeting
2. **Agree** to establish the following standing panels for the 2021/22 municipal year with the following remits and timeframes:
 - i) Finance and Performance Panel – finance and budgetary issues and decisions, annual review of the Council's budget, quarterly monitoring of finance and performance);
 - ii) Housing and Homelessness Panel – strategic housing and landlord issues and decisions, homelessness, housing services performance;
 - iii) Companies Scrutiny Panel - executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council but subject the Committee considering a report on any future governance changes of the Companies and possible impacts on Scrutiny.
3. **Agree** the schedule of meetings as presented within the report noting the cancellation of the Housing and Homelessness Panel on 05 July and the likely rescheduling of the June Companies Scrutiny Panel.

Agree the allocation of seats on standing panels to political groups for 2021/22 (Finance and Performance Panel: 6, Companies Scrutiny Panel: 6, Housing and Homelessness Panel: 6,

4. **Agree** the appointment of Chairs of the Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, and Companies Scrutiny Panels as indicated above.
5. **Agree** i) the new means of managing the Scrutiny function's work plan as in Appendices 2a and 2b, ii) the preliminary work plan covering the period to August 2021 as detailed in Appendix 3 and iii) that Committee members will send ideas for topics for Scrutiny-commissioned reports to the Scrutiny Officer by e mail for consideration at the Committee's 14 July meeting.

8. Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2019/20

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer Healthy Oxford, introduced the report. As a Council which, through its many and various ways of working, comes into contact with a significant number of vulnerable people, it has a statutory duty to keep them as safe as possible. In order to do that, its safeguarding processes are reviewed annually and that audit is made public. All Councillors will have the opportunity to undertake safeguarding training which makes clear the responsibility of everyone to be an active participant in safeguarding our community and which draws attention to the "My Concern" reporting mechanism. The latest audit draws attention to the particular safeguarding issues and challenges resulting from the pandemic. Safeguarding was a matter in which the Council worked in close partnership with other agencies, notably the County Council, the Police and Health Service, all of which are represented on the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) and the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Adults Board (OSAB). The safeguarding duty should extend beyond just ensuring the basic welfare of our citizens and from beyond their surviving to their thriving.

Dani Granito, Policy & Partnerships Team Manager, noted that overall responsibility for safeguarding in OCC now lay with the Head of Corporate Strategy. The report drew attention to the safeguarding work delivered via the locality hubs during the pandemic. This included, for example, the provision of 210 laptops to pupils who could not otherwise access remote learning. A continuing national and local concern was that of neglect; the majority of local children on a child protection plan were experiencing neglect in some form. A considerable effort (via external peer review among other things) was being made to see how best to support those young people and prevent them experiencing neglect. All members of the partnership were now required to produce a Neglect Action Plan and a three monthly account of progress with it.

The OSCB and OSAB required the Council to conduct an annual safeguarding assessment. It was pleasing to note that the most recent assessment had, for the 4th consecutive year, concluded that the Council demonstrated best practice in all 5 subject areas.

The requirement to report "any suspected victims of exploitation (slavery or human trafficking) to the Secretary of State" was of concern to the Committee which sought reassurance that it would not be subverted and used as a means of enforcing immigration controls. Officers emphasised that this reporting requirement fulfilled a statutory obligation and was seen a positive measure, providing a pathway to support. Nonetheless the Committee repeated its wish for the assurance mentioned above.

Officers confirmed that the many voluntary organisations providing support via the locality hubs were subject to the same safeguarding controls, awareness and training as Council employees.

Background was given to the Serious Case Review mentioned in the report and the key findings which had emerged from it.

The report celebrated some examples of positive safeguarding outcomes in numerical form. The Committee suggested that those data would be more meaningful if presented in context and alongside data giving the number of occasions when those outcomes were not positive.

The following recommendations were **AGREED**:

- 1) That the Council ensures that the information it shares with the Secretary of State in relation to slavery and human trafficking is consistent with the City's status as a City of Sanctuary and is not used for immigration enforcement.
- 2) That the Council amends for its publicly available version of the Annual Safeguarding Report the section on outcomes for those who use statutory services to provide the contextual data needed to judge the effectiveness of these service interventions rather than the quantity of positive outcomes.

9. Report back on recommendations

The Scrutiny Officer drew attention to most recent Cabinet responses to previous Scrutiny recommendations.

10. Dates of future meetings

Meetings are scheduled as followed:

Scrutiny Committee

14 July 2021

03 August 2021

08 September 2021

05 October 2021

02 November 2021

06 December 2021

All meetings start at 6.00 pm.

Standing Panels

Housing & Homelessness: 05 July*; 06 October; 04 November

Finance & Performance: 08 July; 02 August; 06 September; 08 December

Companies: 21 June*; 20 September; 14 December

*Please note these dates will change.

11. Matters Exempt From Publication

The Committee passed a resolution in accordance with the provisions of Paragraph 4(2)(b) of the Local Authorities (Executive Arrangements) (Access to Information) (England) Regulations 2012 to exclude the press and the public from the meeting for the following two items on the grounds that their presence could involve the disclosure of exempt information as described in specific paragraphs of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

12. County-Wide Transformation of Rough Sleeping

This item was discussed in confidential session.

13. Covered Market Leasing Strategy

This item was discussed in confidential session.

The meeting started at 6.00 pm and ended at 9.20 pm

Chair Date: Wednesday 14 July 2021