

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Wednesday 7 June 2023

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Committee members present:

Councillor Pegg (Chair)

Councillor Altaf-Khan

Councillor Corais

Councillor Douglas

Councillor Lygo

Councillor Snowton

Councillor Rowley (Vice-Chair)

Councillor Arshad

Councillor Diggins

Councillor Kerr (*substitute to Cllr Jarvis*)

Councillor Mundy

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services

Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager

Alice Courtney, Scrutiny Officer

Celeste Reyeslao, Committee and Member Services Officer

Cabinet Members present:

Councillor Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services

Also present:

Councillor James Fry, Audit and Governance Committee Member

Councillor Roz Smith, Audit and Governance Committee Member

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Dunne and Jarvis sent apologies.

Substitutes are shown above.

1. Election of Chair for the Council year 2023/24

The Committee resolved to elect Cllr Lucy Pegg as Chair for the 2023/24 Council year.

2. Election of Vice Chair for the Council year 2023/24

The Committee resolved to elect Cllr Mike Rowley as Vice Chair for the 2023/24 Council year.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest made.

4. Chair's Announcements

There were no announcements.

5. Minutes

The Committee resolved to **approve** the minutes of the meeting held on 6 March 2023 as a true and accurate record.

6. Scrutiny Operating Principles 2023/24

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the report which asked the Committee to approve the Scrutiny Operating Principles for the 2023/24 Council year, which were broadly similar to previous years.

It was proposed that the Standing Panel and Review Group arrangements from the previous year be re-established, including continuation of the revised arrangements for Companies Scrutiny Panel.

The Scrutiny Officer suggested that the Committee considered the proposed change to the meetings of standing panels and review groups to be held virtually, taking into account additional resources required for in-person and hybrid meetings.

The Chair reminded the Committee to send ideas for Scrutiny-commissioned reports or potential review groups to the Scrutiny Officer in the coming weeks to help formulate the work plan.

The Committee resolved to:

1. **Agree** the proposed Committee Operating Principles for the 2023/24 municipal year, as set out at **Appendix A**.
2. **Agree** to establish the following standing panels for the 2023/24 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 (including performance of the Council's companies);
 - ii. Housing and Homelessness Panel – strategic housing and landlord issues and decisions, homelessness, housing services performance and interaction with the Tenant's Forum;
 - iii. Climate and Environment Panel – climate and environmental issues and decisions, progress and performance monitoring, monitoring delivery of existing strategies, policies and projects;
 - iv. Companies Scrutiny Panel - executive decisions made in relation to any companies wholly or partly owned by the Council.
3. **Agree** to establish a Budget Review Group, comprising the membership of the Finance & Performance Panel, noting that the proposed scope will be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.
4. **Agree** the schedule of meetings as presented within the report.

5. **Agree** the allocation of seats on standing panels to political groups for 2023/24 (Finance and Performance Panel: 4, Housing and Homelessness Panel: 6, Climate and Environment Panel: 4, Companies Scrutiny Panel: 4 are recommended).
6. **Agree** to appoint members and chairs of the Finance and Performance, Housing and Homelessness, Climate and Environment and Companies Scrutiny Panels or any other panels as agreed by the Committee in accordance with nominations made by political groups.
 - **Housing and Homelessness Panel:** Cllr Lizzy Diggins (Chair), Cllr Dunne, Cllr Fouweather, Cllr Nala-Hartley, Cllr Rawle, Cllr Sandelson
 - **Finance and Performance Panel:** Cllr Fry (Chair), Cllr Djafari-Marbini, Cllr Jarvis, Cllr Smowton
 - **Climate and Environment Panel:** Cllr Hollingsworth (Chair), Cllr Dunne, Cllr Kerr, Cllr Miles
 - **Companies Scrutiny Panel:** Cllr Rowley (Chair), Cllr Miles, Cllr Morris, Cllr Walcott
7. **Agree** that the Chair of the Finance and Performance Panel will Chair the Budget Review Group.
8. **Agree**
 - i. The preliminary Work Plan covering the period to September 2023 as detailed at Appendix B; and
 - ii. 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 04 July meeting.
9. **Note** the Scrutiny Guide for Councillors at Appendix D.

7. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Committee noted the following Cabinet responses to its recommendations:

- Oxford City Council Corporate Business Plan 2023
- Integrated Care System Draft Strategy Update
- Integrated Performance Report for Q3 2022/23
- Development of a Biodiversity Strategy for Oxford
- Fleet Decarbonisation
- Housing, Homelessness and Rough Sleeping Strategy 2023-28

The Committee noted that since the Scrutiny Committee's meeting on 06 March 2023, the Climate and Environment Panel had met on 09 March 2023, the Housing and Homelessness Panel had met twice on 13 March and 24 April 2023, and the Companies Scrutiny Panel had joined the meeting of the Shareholder and Joint Venture Group on 27 April 2023.

8. Reports for approval

The Committee resolved to approve the Tenancy Agreement report and recommend its submission to Cabinet for its meeting in June 2023.

9. Housing Management System Implementation

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services and Council Companies presented the report which updated members on the lessons learned from the implementation of the Housing Management System and the outcome of discussions with the supplier in regard to potential settlement. The report requested Cabinet approval of additional budget for further development of the product after the move to 'business as usual' had been secured. He highlighted improvements surrounding the governance and leadership of the project and stated that the implementation of the system had now reached the stage where its capabilities could be fully exploited.

Members of the Audit and Governance Committee joined the meeting to participate in the discussion as non-voting members.

Cllr Corais arrived at the meeting.

Cllr Nigel Chapman, Nigel Kennedy, Head of Financial Services, and Bill Graves, Landlord Services Manager responded to the Committee's queries as follows:

- In addition to a disaster contingency plan, strong cyber security measures were currently in place which would be further enforced by the recruitment of a new Cyber Security Specialist.
- A project manager with expertise in the housing management system had now been appointed alongside three dedicated staff. Further to ensuring experienced resources were sought, it was assured that further scrutiny had been applied to the range of IT projects undertaken and the prioritisation of gateway processes across all businesses of the Council as part of lessons learnt in mitigating potential risks in the future.
- In relation to the retrospective budget allocation, a review of the approvals revealed that there were aspects of expenditure which had not been brought to the Cabinet formally due to time constraints, however it was confirmed that all additional spend went through appropriate approval processes.
- On the question of Intellectual Property (IP) ownership and whether potential revenue could be benefited through this, it was confirmed that the supplier held the rights for the IP and therefore the Council would not have the ability to generate income.
- The supplier was considered the third biggest housing system provider with the core system being widely used by other local authorities nationally. In terms of the bespoke element relating to choice-based lettings functionality and enhanced housing options, the original intention was that the Council would lead the use of these elements and serve as a roadmap for other local authorities. The supplier had since concluded to partner with an alternative provider which already specialised in the ready-made solutions used by councils.
- The system reached its 'steady state' in November 2022. The intention now was to exploit the product by working closely with the supplier to develop and integrate certain robust features in order for both staff and tenants to further benefit by finding its use easier and more immediate such as mobility, online customer portal, stock and asset management, etc.

The Committee resolved to make the following recommendations to Cabinet:

1. That the Council ensures there is a contingency plan when reaching a critical point in future projects, so that project implementation can be reverted back to an earlier 'working' status if it becomes clear that there are issues and/or errors with implementation.

10. Dates of future meetings

The dates of future meetings were noted.

The meeting started at 6.03 pm and ended at 7.01 pm

Chair

Date: Tuesday 4 July 2023

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council's Constitution.