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OXFORD
CITY
COUNCIL

To: Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee

Date: 25th. June 2012

Report of: Head of Law and Governance

Title of Report: Work Programme Planning 2012-2013

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To allow committee members to consider suggestions made for the work programme and begin to plan their work for the coming year.
Key decision? No

Scrutiny Lead Member: Committee Chair

Recommendations:

1. To note the methods of working and resources available

2. To consider the long list of items presented and other suggestions at the meeting and decide which issues to pursue this year

3. When placing an item in the programme to agree:

- How the issue will be scrutinised
- The broad scoping
- The members who will be involved
- The lead members
- An details of co-option
- Requirement for reporting

Introduction

1. Each year the committee sets a programme to guide its debates and inquiries for the coming year. This report is to allow members to set the outline of the programme for 2012/2013. The outcomes in the form of recommendations from last year's programme are available on request.

2. This meeting has a number of agenda items and committee may feel they do not have enough time to discuss and decide on their programme. Should this be the case an informal meeting date should be set at the earliest opportunity. Suggestions for this are:

- Thursday 5th. July
- Monday 9th. July
- Tuesday 10th. July
- Tuesday 31st. July

3. This is one of two scrutiny committees – Communities and Partnership (CAP) and Value and Performance (VAP). The remits of the 2 committees are broadly set as inward and outward facing with this committee (VAP) taking the inward facing role. In practice the distinction between the 2 committees is not always easy to draw and so members are asked to act collaboratively to allow for effective work flows.

4. In an effort to fit with the organisation the Councils Corporate Priorities are used as a guide:

- Vibrant Sustainable Economy – CAP
- Meeting Housing Need – CAP
- Strong, Active Communities – CAP
- Cleaner Greener Oxford – VAP
- Efficient, Effective Council - VAP

General Principals of Working

5. In 2011/2012 committees agreed that all housing related issues (landlord and strategic) would be taken together at CAP. This decision was taken in an effort to fit with the organisation and recognise the need for holistic responses to housing issues. This proved successful and a Housing Standing Panel was set under CAP. It is hoped that members will agree to keep all housing issue together regardless of whether a Housing Standing Panel is set or not. Members will notice that a "housing related issue" appears in the long list of suggestions for you to consider – "Fundamental service review, housing repairs costs and quality". This has been included here because of the focus on value for money.

6. In order to bring forward suggestions officers have:
- Asked all councillors what they would like to see in the programme. Councillors were directed to think as both ward representatives and members of the City Council.
- Considered the work undertaken in 2011/2012 and brought forward any issues arising or outstanding
- Identified key issues from the work planned by the Council in the first half year

7. Missing from this list are the views of residents as individuals or communities. One of the key roles of scrutiny committees is to "Enable the Voice of Communities". The views of communities should be considered both in planning the topics to be considered and debating and concluding on recommendations. Councillors as ward representative act as community leaders and are a good source of knowledge but Committee needs to consider if it wishes to go further than his in planning for the future.

8. Scrutiny councillors work in a number of ways to take their evidence, form their opinions and make their recommendations. The table below shows those used in Oxford and an outline suggestion of the capacity there is to deliver within these. Obviously the focus is for the committee to decide and so adjustments around the deployment of capacity are for members to debate.

Methodology	Outline	Frequency
Committee Meetings	Formal public meetings. All committee members. Holding decision makers to account, short term inquiries, pre scrutiny of decisions, call in, review reports.	4 planned meetings plus a planning meeting
Select Committee	Formal public meetings. All committee members but with a few working behind the scenes to agree a scope and write a select committee report. Taking evidence in public around a particular issue, decision or proposal.	Usually within the planned committee meeting slots above but additional slots can be added. 2 if held within planned meeting slots. 1 if additional slots required.
Standing Panel	Informal private or public meetings. No more than 5 members of the committee. Small groups meeting to consider or develop a particular set of information or actions	1 Panel, meeting as required but usually about 4 or 5 times a year.

	regularly.	
Short Term Panel	Informal private or public meetings. No more than 5 members of the committee. Small groups meeting to pursue short term inquires or respond to proposals from the organisation or its partners.	2 Panels meeting 3 or 4 times each over a short period.
Review Group	Informal public or private meetings. No more than 5 members of the committee. Small group making detailed inquiries and investigations into a topic, service or issue.	1 group meeting as required over a period of between 3 and 6 months. Work will often require members to be involved in a more detailed way than attending meetings.
Championing of Issues	Informal work within the organisation or with partners. Councillors acting as spokespersons or champions for the views or recommendations of the committee.	As many as committee wish to delegate.

All these have their part to play in a balanced programme. The skill is to:

- Be sure that the issues chosen for the programme are likely to add value, have broad support and have a clear aim.
- Choose the correct method for the subject matter through issue scoping.
- Engage councillors that are "interested" in the topic and are willing to give their time.
- Co-opt people to bring skills and broaden opinion.

9. The resources available to the committee fall into 3 groups:

- Staff in Democratic Services – 1 Scrutiny Officer plus the equivalent of 1 Democratic Services Officer.

- The time, skills and information provided by senior officers and City Executive Board Members who are required to attend and advise scrutiny.
- The time and skills of scrutiny councillors.

10. The work programme you are about to decide will guide the year and will be managed by the committee through discussions at each committee meeting and in-between meetings by the committee Chair and Vice Chair. In practice this broadly means:

- The whole committee will decide on the themes and issues it wishes to pursue and then delegate these to the groups that it sets. The detail of that delegation is for the committee to decide but should be a minimum of identifying a lead councillor and setting a broad scope for the work.
- The work programme has a degree of flexibility and will be available at each committee meeting for members to discuss and adjust as necessary.
- Any committee member or any 4 members of Council can place an item on the agenda of a committee and it is for the committee to decide how much time it gives to the item.
- Committee must review and report back on issues required by the Full Council. The timing of these issues is for the committee to decide upon. The committee does not have to undertake reviews requested by the Executive but should give these requests proper consideration.
- The committee must consider decisions that have been "called-in" at its next available meeting or at a meeting called by the Monitoring Officer.
- The committee can require, with reasonable notice, City Executive Board Members and Senior Officers to attend their meetings and debates and to provide information.
- Scrutiny is entitled to see and review information relating to the issues it is scrutinising (this includes confidential information).
- When conclusions are drawn and recommendations agreed these are presented by the Committee Chair or another Lead Councillor agreed by the committee.
- Panels will present their own recommendations without reference back to the committee unless this has been specifically required at set up. These recommendations will be shown to the Chair and Vice Chair of the committee before presentation.
- Decision makers are required to consider and respond to the recommendations made by scrutiny.
- Lead Members will be required to keep the committee up to date on the progress of their work through committee meetings and other informal networks.
- A report back on the success or otherwise of recommendations will be presented to each committee meeting.

11. The committee is able to co-opt individuals onto their committees, panels and reviews in an effort to broaden skills and engagement. The only restrictions on this are:

- They are not able to vote.
- There is no budget available to pay them.
- They cannot be members of the City Executive Board.

12. Members are advised to consider co-option at all stages of their work.

Suggestions for the Programme

13. **Appendix 1** shows the suggestions made for the programme. At this stage members need to decide:

- The items they wish to pursue.
- The method they wish to us.
- Which members will take part.
- Who will take the lead?

14. When making selections members should be mindful of:

- The resources available (see paragraphs 8 and 9).
- The need to leave "room" for new and topical items as they arise.
- Tasks always take longer than anticipated!
- Having a clear reason for pursuing an issue and the likelihood of adding value.
- The one year life of the committee means to get good outcomes we need to start early and strongly.

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List of background papers:
Version number:1

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Suggestion/Issue	Source	Methodology	Comment
Council Tax benefit scheme development	Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee	Committee Inquiry/Panel	Local scheme required for March 2013.
Business rates changes	Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee	Committee Inquiry	Financial effects for Oxford. Start March 2013.
Transition to Universal Credit	Value and Performance Scrutiny Committee	Committee Inquiry	Transition starting October 2013. Funding draw down and budgetary effects. Customer – face to face inquiry support (extent and cost of provision). Partnership with City advice agencies.
Next government spending review implications for the Medium Term Financial Strategy	Finance and Performance Panel	Standing Panel	Part of the budget review build up.
Review of budget proposals 13/14	Finance and Performance Panel	Review	Detail review conducted each year.

			If a Finance and Performance Panel is set then it is advised that these members form this Review Group in order to utilise and build on gained knowledge and experience.
Treasury Management Strategy	Finance and Performance Panel	Standing Panel	Formal role to scrutinise. In previous years this has been undertaken by the Finance and Performance Panel because of the clear links to budget development and performance.
Investment in youth services – focus and outcomes	Finance and Performance Panel	Committee Inquiry/Panel	Agreed outcomes and performance against these for the new investment agreed in the 2012/2013 budget.
Fundamental Service Review – Housing repairs cost and quality	Finance and Performance Panel, Councillors	Panel (maybe lead councillor)	Targets for the review are they challenging enough and represent good value for money principles. Do they fit with the needs of the organisation and customers?
Performance again service and corporate targets	Finance and Performance Panel, Councillors	Standing Panel	This committee or 1 of its Panels has considered performance against set

			targets in all programmes. In the last year the City Executive Board decided to only have reported to it formally the performance against corporate targets. This committees Finance and Performance Panel decided it wished to continue to monitor service targets as well because of its desire to look in more detail at the individual performance of services and to keep abreast of some of the important corporate health indicators that don't make the corporate set.
Housing benefit administration costs – next steps after the fundamental service review	Councillors	Committee Inquiry	Targets set for further cost reductions. How are these to be achieved and top quartile performance levels stabilised?
Covered Market – the economic impact on small traders of allowing "chain stores" into the market.	Councillors	Review	This could be a very broad subject given the nature of current economic conditions for traders generally. If chosen a clear focus would be needed.

HMO registration –review of the scheme to access the impact it is having on the availability, quality and cost of rented accommodation.	Councillors	Panel	It is likely that many factors affect the cost, quality and availability of rented accommodation (particularly so in challenging economic markets). To do this work with any degree of credibility a clear focus and expert advice would be needed.
Council spending and policies and their impact on jobs and the local economy.	Councillors	Review	Considering the broad spectrum of Council policy this would be too large a review to be undertaken. Members could however decide to focus in one particular area of policy or look at how the Council takes account of economics effects and considerations in the development of policy.
Recycling rates – what is the ambition to increase these and how can we go beyond this.	Councillors	Committee Inquiry possibly followed by a Panel	The ambition to increase recycling rates is detailed in the councils Corporate Plan. The focus for this would therefore be how to go beyond these.

Noise and nuisance service – How to more effectively respond to residents complaints.	Councillors	Review	This subject has been considered by the committee in outline terms in previous work programmes. What was learnt was that effective responses are only delivered in partnership with other agencies. If this is chosen all partners would need to participate.
The infrastructure for electric car charging points across the City. What has been agreed either outside or inside the County Transport Policy?	Councillors	Committee Inquiry	This is a County Council issue and presented by the councillor as a "for information" point. These are best presented as general briefings for councillors rather than using the scrutiny process.
Asset Management Plan – has this worked entirely satisfactorily?	Councillors	Committee Inquiry	A Panel at the end of the programme last year gave an opinion on this.
Employment practices – how representative is our work force across the equality strands and as a match to the population we serve.	Councillors	Committee Inquiry, Panel	This is a corporate priority but to add value the committee would need to do more than take an overview of general performance. The issue was

How do we train and promote employees across the equality strands.			included in the programme for last year but work did not start. The expected focus was gender.
Increase in the number of apprentices. How is this going? How are we making sure these young people live in the City?	Councillors	Standing Panel	Corporate target Take as part of performance monitory
What contribution is the Planning Department making to "greening" the City?	Councillors	Review	It is not clear what the focus for this issue might be.
The Destination Management Organisation – the ambition was for the City Council to reduce funding. What is the current position?	Councillors	Committee Inquiry	Details of the current financing arrangements matched against ambitions.
Sickness Absence performance improvement.	Officers	Committee Inquiry	For a number of years the committee has taken detailed reports on sickness absence rates across the Council. In latter years this has shown an improving picture. The Council has set itself an ambitious target to reduce absence

			levels further. How is this to be achieved, what and where are the issues, how do we match in current performance terms against similar authorities?

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