

To:	Council
Date:	18 April 2016
Report of:	Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
Title of Report:	Scrutiny Briefing
Purpose of report:	To update Council on the activities of the scrutiny function

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Scrutiny work programme

Appendix 2 - Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker

Introduction

1. We're coming to the end of another productive year for Scrutiny and a busy programme of meetings will be concluded in mid-April. Two review groups (guest houses and the budget) have already completed their work and a third, the Equality and Diversity Review Group, is now expected to report in June.
2. As I have previously highlighted, Scrutiny has played an important role in contributing to and improving council decision making as well as helping to deliver tangible financial benefits to the organisation.
3. A total 39 scrutiny meetings will have taken place by the end of the current council year. This includes fifteen review group meetings and two one-off single-issue panels as well as meetings of the Scrutiny Committee, Finance Panel and Housing Panel.
4. The Committee and two Standing Panels will have considered some 73 items this year, including 35 pre-decision reports and 37 reports specifically requested by scrutiny based on member priorities. The Committee also heard one call in of an executive decision. Feedback following the Corporate Peer Challenge in 2014 was that Scrutiny could have a more proactive improvement focus as the emphasis appeared to be on holding the executive to account, and Scrutiny has continued to follow this advice. A 50/50 balance between pre-scrutinising City

Executive Board (CEB) decisions and commissioning reports independently is similar to last year and enables scrutiny to pursue its own agenda with an improvement focus while also monitoring and contributing to selected executive decisions.

5. Since May 2015 Scrutiny has made a total of 176 recommendations to CEB, of which 123 (70%) have been agreed and a further 27 (15%) agreed in part. This includes recommendations from three review groups that were initiated in the 2014-15 council year but not all of the work that was started in 2015-16.
6. As this may be my final briefing to Council as Chair of Scrutiny, I'd like to thank all elected members and members of the public who have engaged in the scrutiny process over the last two years, including members who suggested topics for Scrutiny to consider, as well as committee members, their substitutes and members of panels and review groups. I'd also like to thank Board Members for their contributions at meetings and for providing helpful and considered responses to recommendations. Scrutiny could not function as effectively as it does without the support and buy-in of the organisation so I'd also like to thank the officers at all levels who have helped to support the work of Scrutiny in my time as Chair.

Work plan

7. Scrutiny has requested suggestions of topics and issues that members would like to see included in the work plan for the coming year. Scrutiny can consider anything the Council is responsible for or anything that affects the city or its people, although health, policing and County Council functions are scrutinised by other bodies. Please email your suggestions by 20 May 2016 to Andrew Brown, abrown2@oxford.gov.uk. In June the new Committee will consider and prioritise all suggestions received.

Current Activity

Guest Houses Review Group

8. The Review Group's report recommended the introduction of a local code of good practice for guest houses to sign up to, with a degree of oversight to check compliance.
9. The Board has now responded to the recommendations and will discuss with senior officers the resource implications of the agenda set out in the report and seek to identify the how to effectively deliver the actions proposed.

Equality and Diversity Review Group

10. The Equality and Diversity Review Group is focused on finding ways of overcoming barriers faced by under-represented groups on the Council's workforce. This Review Group chaired by Councillor Tom Hayes will meet to agree its recommendations before reporting to Scrutiny and CEB in June 2016.

The Scrutiny Committee

11. The Committee has recently considered reports on taxi licensing and Customer Contact performance as well as pre-scrutinising the following City Executive Board decisions - the numbers of recommendations made to the Board and those agreed (either in full or in part) are in brackets:
- Grant Allocations to Community & Voluntary orgs (0)
 - Corporate Plan 2016-20 (3 / 2)
 - Go Ultra Low Oxford Grant Funding (0)
 - Universal Credit Delivery Partnership Agreement (3 / 3)
 - Working with those already NEET - application to European Structural & Investment Fund (0)
 - Waterways PSPO – pre consultation (1 / 1)
12. The Committee met on 5 April to consider reports members requested on the Council's Youth Ambition programme, tackling isolation, graffiti removal and the Tree Management Plan. The Committee also pre-scrutinised a revision to the Discretionary Housing Payments (DHP) policy and monitored progress following the work of the Local Economy Review Group. Recommendations of tackling isolation and the DHP policy will be presented to CEB on 14 April 2016.

Housing Panel

13. The Housing Panel has recently considered some major housing-related decisions including the Review of Older Persons Accommodation (0), Private Sector Housing Policy (5 / 5), Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funds (0), and in a joint session with the Finance Panel, A Housing Company for Oxford (2 / 1). The Panel has also considered other topics of interest to members including the Tower Project, Great Estates programme and security in communal areas of tower blocks. The Panel meets on 11 April to focus on Tenant Involvement.

Finance Panel

14. The Finance Panel meets on 7 April to consider a report members requested on Council Tax and Business Rates exemptions and discounts. The Panel will be speaking with representatives of both Credit Unions operating in the city, Oxfordshire Credit Union and Blackbird Leys Credit Union, to consider and independent evaluation report as well as the support Credit Unions receive from the Council in light of recent regulatory changes. The Panel will also hold a follow up discussion with a representative of the Low Carbon Hub to discuss the Hub's funding model.

Looking Ahead

15. Scrutiny will meet in June to consider its standing panels and priority topics for the year ahead. The Committee will also consider reports on educational attainment, the employment of interns, apprentices and work experience students and planning enforcement.

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