

To:	Council
Date:	25 July 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 plan 2016-17 – July 2016

Appendix 2 - Scrutiny Recommendation Tracker 2016-17 – July 2016

Introduction

1. I'd like to start by thanking members of the Scrutiny Committee for putting their faith in me by electing me to the important position of Chair of Scrutiny for the year ahead. I'd also like to pay tribute to the previous Chair, Councillor Craig Simmons, who has done an excellent job in leading and developing the Council's scrutiny function over the last two years.
2. The new Committee has already held two very productive meetings and has agreed a work plan for the year. There have been some changes to the membership of the Scrutiny Committee so I'd like to take this opportunity to welcome Councillors Jamila Azad, Nigel Chapman, Marie Tidball and Ruth Wilkinson, all of whom are already making a valuable contribution to the work of the Committee. I'd also like to thank the members they replaced for all their contributions over recent years; Councillors Ben Lloyd-Shogbesan and Linda Smith, who chaired the Housing Panel with distinction, and former Councillors Roy Darke and Sam Hollick.
3. The Committee has agreed to continue with the Housing and Finance Standing Panels. These Panels have held their first meetings and will be chaired by Councillor David Henwood and Councillor Craig Simmons respectively.

Work plan

4. The Committee has agreed a work plan for the year (see appendix 1). The work plan sets out selected topics and issues suggested by elected members and senior officers that will be considered at meetings of the Scrutiny Committee, two standing panels and review groups over the coming months. I would like to thank all members who contributed ideas to the work plan, many of which are being taken forwards. The work plan as it currently stands is not necessarily exhaustive because Scrutiny will have some flexibility to react to emerging issues during the year, and to scrutinise selected decisions before they are taken by the City Executive Board. The priorities for review work have been identified by the Committee as being devolution proposals for Oxfordshire and the impacts of language schools in the City, as well as the annual budget review. This provides Scrutiny with a busy but achievable programme of work.
5. The Scrutiny Work Plan has a slightly different look this year. It now lists whether or not each item is a CEB decision, and the executive portfolio(s) that the item relates to. The work plan is now managed online and will be published (at least) monthly, like the Forward Plan, with all members included in the circulation. I would encourage Board Members in particular to check the work plan for future items that fall within your executive remits, although you will of course continue to be notified of these separately.

Current Activity

The Scrutiny Committee

6. At meetings in June and July the Scrutiny Committee considered reports on the following topics prioritised by Scrutiny. The numbers of recommendations made to the Board and those agreed (either in full or in part) are in brackets:
 - Report of the Equality and Diversity Review Group (21 / 14)
 - Planning & Regulatory Service Plan (0)
 - Planning enforcement (0)
 - Westhill Farm (0)
 - Apprentices (9 / 7)
 - Corporate performance report 2015/16 quarter 4 (0)
 - Fusion Lifestyle performance report 2015/16 (0)
7. In addition, the Committee pre-scrutinised three City Executive Board decisions:
 - Oxford City Council Safeguarding Report 2015/16 (6 / 6)
 - Fusion Lifestyle's 2016/17 Annual Service Plan (7 / 6)
 - Grant Allocations – Monitoring Report (2 / 2)
8. The Committee also approved the report of the Equality and Diversity Review Group subject to a few amendments and constituted a new review group to look at devolution plans for Oxfordshire (see below).

Housing Panel

9. The Housing Panel met on 7 July and elected Councillor David Henwood as chair for the year. Councillors Jennifer Pegg, Angie Goff and David Thomas have

joined the Panel in place of Councillor Linda Smith and former Councillors Elise Benjamin and Mike Gotch. The Panel also re-appointed Geno Humphrey as the tenant representative for the year and I would like to thank Geno for giving up his time to make an important and useful contribution to the work of the Panel. The following items were considered by the Panel in July:

- Housing Performance Q4 2015/16 (0 / 0)
- Tenant satisfaction (0 / 0)
- Private Sector Housing Policy (post-consultation) (1 / 1)
- Review of the Lord Mayor's Deposit Guarantee Scheme (1 / 1)

Finance Panel

10. The Finance Panel met on 30 June and Councillor Craig Simmons was re-elected as Chair. Councillor Sian Taylor has replaced Councillor Tom Hayes on the Panel for this year. The Panel agreed its work plan which includes items on the financial impacts of Brexit, divestment, the Council Tax support scheme, and of course the annual budget review, which will include a focus on gross budgeting and on the outcomes of comprehensive reviews of a number of Council services. The Panel considered the following items in June:

- Integrated Performance Report Q4 2015/16 (0 / 0)
- Credit union services (recommendations to follow)

11. The Panel has submitted some observations to Council on the performance report and a report on credit union services will be submitted to the City Executive Board in September.

Equality and Diversity Review Group

12. The Equality and Diversity Review Group, chaired by Councillor Tom Hayes, has now concluded its work. This review focused on equality and diversity in the Council workforce and specifically on overcoming barriers in career progression faced by under-represented groups and preventing and addressing discrimination, in particular against lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender employees. A report with 21 recommendations was endorsed by the Scrutiny Committee before being presented to CEB in July. Key recommendations related to recruitment, talent management, internal communications, training, equalities monitoring and the use of gender-inclusive titles on Council forms.

Devolution Review Group

13. The Devolution Review Group is comprised of Councillors Marie Tidball (Chair), Van Coulter, Andrew Gant, Tom Hayes and Craig Simmons. An outline scope has been presented to the Committee and the Review Group has been tasked with tightening up its focus once two reports on unitary options for Oxfordshire have been published. This work could involve looking at how the combined authority would operate in practice, what democratic controls would be retained by its constituent councils and what the lines of accountability and scrutiny should look like. It is envisaged that evidence gathering will begin in September and will include discussions with representatives of various partner organisations.

Language Schools

14. The Committee has agreed that its second major piece of review work this year will be to look at the impacts of English language schools operating in the City. A

report will be coming to Scrutiny later this year setting out how the Council is working with partners to tackle some of the safeguarding aspects around certain types of language schools operating in the City, including 'pop-up' schools and those registered offshore. In particular the Committee has expressed concerns around students under the age of 18 being accommodated in the private sector with few checks on their welfare. These concerns have also been discussed at the City Executive Board and I'm grateful for their support and endorsement of this review. The membership of the review group will be agreed at a future Committee meeting and its work will commence when the devolution review is drawing to a close.

Looking Ahead

15. The next Committee and Panel meetings take place in September, when a number of CEB decisions such as the Planning Annual Monitoring Report and the revised Tree Management Plan are expected to come forward for Scrutiny, as well as a report on the financial impacts of Brexit. In the meantime, Scrutiny will be organising its work plan for the year, planning the devolution review and preparing an annual report for 2015/16 which will be presented to Council in September.

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