

<b>To:</b>	Council
<b>Date:</b>	5 December 2016
<b>Report of:</b>	Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<b>Title of Report:</b>	Scrutiny Briefing
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Council on the activities of the scrutiny function

## Appendices

*Appendix 1 - Scrutiny work plan*

*Appendix 2 - Scrutiny recommendation tracker*

## Introduction

1. My last report to Council was an annual report for 2015/16 so I will use this opportunity to update members on the activities of the scrutiny function since my July report. I would like to thank all the Board Members and Council Officers who have attended our meetings to discuss an array of topics issues and decisions that affect the City and its residents. I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Committee for their contributions to a range of very interesting debates.

## Work plan

2. We are progressing through our annual work plan and are on track to consider all of the various items we prioritised by the end of the year. The next couple of months will be particularly busy with the conclusion of the devolution review and the annual budget review.

## Current Activity

### **The Scrutiny Committee**

3. Scrutiny Committee meetings were held in September, October and November. The Committee considered reports on the following topics prioritised by Scrutiny Members. The numbers of recommendations submitted to the City Executive Board and those agreed (either in full or in part), are shown in brackets. A

number of these items did not result in recommendations to the Board but were nevertheless very useful in terms of providing information and assurance to Scrutiny Members and enabling us to hold the organisation to account:

- Educational Attainment (0 / 0)
- Air Quality (6 / TBC)
- Discretionary Housing Payments spend (0 / 0)
- Fusion Lifestyle's Service Plan – additional information (0 / 0)
- Inequality Panel – recommendation monitoring (0 / 0)
- Credit Union Services (1 / 1)
- Corporate performance for 2016/17 – Quarter 1 (0 / 0)

4. In addition, the Committee pre-scrutinised the following City Executive Board decisions:

- OxLEP Strategic Economic Plan Refresh (3 / 3)
- Review of Tree Management Policy (4 / 4)
- Annual Monitoring Report (AMR) 2015/16 (1 / 1)
- Digital Strategy (5 / 4)
- European Regional Development Fund (ERDF) Innovation Projects – Match Funding (0 / 0)

5. The Committee received very positive feedback from two professors who attended the educational attainment discussion and were very impressed by the workings of Scrutiny and its efficiency. They also said that councillors were clearly diligent and well informed for the interesting discussion that took place.

### **Housing Panel**

6. The Housing Panel met in October and November and considered the following items. The university housing needs item was attended by representatives of the University of Oxford and Oxford Brookes University, as well as the Board Member and Council Officers. Both universities emphasised difficulties caused by the high cost of housing in Oxford and proposed changes to the Council's planning policies which will feed in to discussions on the local plan review:

- University housing needs (TBC)
- Houses in multiple occupations (HMOs) (0 / 0)
- Rent performance (0 / 0)
- Choice Based Lettings refusal reasons (0 / 0)
- Under-occupation in the Council's housing stock (0 / 0)
- Energy Strategy (0 / 0)
- Housing Performance 2016/17 – Quarter 1 (0 / 0)
- Housing Performance 2016/17 – Quarter 2 (0 / 0)

7. The Housing Panel will join the Finance Panel in January for consideration of the Housing Revenue Account business plan and other housing-related budgetary proposals.

### **Finance Panel**

8. The Finance Panel last met in September and considered the following items:

- The implications of Brexit for local government (2 / 2)
- Council Tax support scheme (0 / 0)

- Treasury management annual report and performance 2015/16 (0 / 0)
9. The Brexit report provided to the Panel sets out the immediate impacts of the vote to leave the European Union and has been circulated to all members. The Panel identified some additional financial opportunities and risks that should be monitored and recommended a wider study of the impacts of Brexit on the Oxfordshire economy.

### **Devolution Review Group**

10. The Devolution Review Group met in September and, after a discussion involving City and County Council Leaders and Chief Executives, decided the scope of a scrutiny review. The Committee agreed that the review should examine what governance structures could provide the strong, accountable governance to deliver a devolution deal while balancing cost savings and stable, high quality long-term service delivery.
11. A further four meetings have now taken place and members have had the opportunity to explore these issues in details with a range of other witnesses, including:
- The Chair of Oxfordshire Local Enterprise Partnership,
  - Consultants from Pricewaterhouse Coopers,
  - A consultant involved in devolution for Cambridgeshire and Peterborough,
  - Oxfordshire Clinical Commissioning Group,
  - The Leaders of the County and City councils,
  - The County Director,
  - Senior County Council officers for social care and children's services,
  - The Chief Executive and Assistant Chief Executive of the City Council,
  - The Council's Head of Planning and Regulatory.
12. The Review Group is now in the process of reflecting on all the evidence provided and formulating recommendations. These will focus on what an offer to Government for devolved powers should look like and what sort of governance structures would need to be in place to secure a deal and facilitate the best outcomes. Recommendations will draw on the evidence provided to the Review Group including lessons from devolution in Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.
13. The report will be considered at a special Scrutiny Committee meeting on 12 January 2017 and, if approved, submitting it to the City Executive Board on 19 January. This additional meeting will ensure that the report can be completed to a good standard and properly considered by Scrutiny Members and the City Executive Board, avoiding a clash with the budget.

### **Looking Ahead**

14. The Committee meets in early December and late January. Expected items include a report on safeguarding language school students, which may inform a piece of review work in early 2017. The Committee will also be scrutinising decisions on the Commissioned Advice Strategy, Grants to Community and Voluntary Organisations and an update on the Corporate Plan. The Committee will also monitor the implementation of previous review group recommendations

on cycling and recycling rates – with a site visit to the Cowley Marsh depot planned for 29 November 2017.

15. The Finance Panel meets in December and then again as the Budget Review Group on four dates in early January. The Budget Review will involve a detailed line by line review and discussions with senior managers on the council's budget proposals for the next four years.

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