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| <b>To:</b>                | Council  |
| <b>Date:</b>              | 24 April 2017  |
| <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 – April 2017*

*Appendix 2 - Scrutiny recommendation tracker – February 2017 to April 2017*

## Introduction

1. The first thing to say on behalf of the Scrutiny Committee is how saddened we were about the passing of our esteemed colleague Cllr Van Coulter. Van was a very engaged scrutiny councillor who had chaired a number of scrutiny reviews with distinction and always remained focused on making real improvements to peoples' lives. He will be sorely missed. An impeccably observed minute's silence was held at our meeting on 27 March 2017.
2. We're approaching the end of the Council year and my first 12 months as Chair of Scrutiny have certainly been busy and interesting. Scrutiny has sought to continue to make incremental improvements to the scrutiny function whilst also adapting to the changing needs of the organisation. An example is the recent establishment of a new Scrutiny Shareholder Panel to scrutinise executive decisions relating to the new Council-owned companies.
3. The Scrutiny Committee's annual report for 2016/17 will be presented to Council in September and will summarise the work the Committee has undertaken and commissioned this year. By the time of annual council a total of 35 scrutiny meetings will have taken place; 11 committee meetings, 10 standing panel meetings, 10 review group meetings and 4 one-off meetings. This year only one-third of all the substantive items considered at meetings of the Committee and

two standing panels have been City Executive Board (CEB) decisions. The majority of the reports considered were independently commissioned by Scrutiny. In the previous two years there was a fifty-fifty split between CEB and non-CEB items. To date 84% of Scrutiny recommendations to the CEB have been agreed, with 6% agreed in part and only 9% not agreed.

4. Effective scrutiny is an essential component of good governance but it doesn't just happen. It requires effort, strong relationships and a positive organisational culture for Scrutiny to function effectively and add value to Council business and decision making. To this end I would like to put on record my thanks to all the members who have contributed to the scrutiny process this year, either as committee or panel members, or as Board Members who have attended and contributed to our various debates. At the main committee Board Members have been present for the vast majority of our discussions and the Committee are grateful to them for buying-in to the scrutiny process. I would also like to thank all the Council officers who have supported Scrutiny during the year by writing reports and attending meetings, sometimes until quite late in the evening. Particular thanks as always go to Andrew Brown, our unfailingly able and reliable Scrutiny Officer, and Sarah Claridge for clerking with great efficiency. I'm sure with this continued support the Committee can build on the good progress that has been made in recent years and continue to go from strength to strength.

## **Work plan**

5. The latest Scrutiny work plan can be found in Appendix 1. A new work plan for 2017/18 is now being formulated based on suggestions from all members and senior officers. To contribute suggestions for the new scrutiny work plan please email Andrew Brown ([abrown2@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:abrown2@oxford.gov.uk)) by 21 May 2017. In June the new Committee will consider and prioritise all suggestions received and this exercise will help to inform which items will be selected as a priority for review.

## **Current Activity**

### **Scrutiny Shareholder Panel**

6. The establishment of Council-owned companies introduces a new dynamic to the scrutiny function because, strictly speaking, company directors are independent and legally separate from the Council and are therefore not accountable to Scrutiny in the normal way. Scrutiny can however review company performance and hold the shareholder (i.e. CEB meeting as a 'Shareholder Group') and their advisors to account for the decisions they make as a company shareholder.
7. The Committee has therefore established a new panel, very ably chaired by Cllr Fry and including the chairs of the committee and two standing panels, in order to scrutinise shareholder decisions. On 22 March 2017 the Panel met to consider the business plan for the Council's housing company, Oxford City Housing Limited, before the Shareholder Group met to endorse this plan. The Panel were supportive of the aims of the company and sought and received assurances on a number of specific points. The Panel asked to meet again in the summer to consider a sensitivity analysis of the 40-year business plan, together with responses to written questions. It is envisaged that the Panel will take a similar

approach to shareholder decisions affecting the new wholly-owned Direct Services trading company and potentially to OxWED, in which the Council has a 50% shareholding.

### **Health Inequalities Panel**

8. The Health Inequalities Panel followed on from the work of Inequalities Panel, also chaired by Cllr Coulter. The Panel focused specifically on the City Council's role in implementing the recommendations of the Oxfordshire Health Inequalities Commission. The Panel produced ten recommendations of their own, which have all been accepted by the Board. This was sadly Cllr Coulter's final contribution and it's fitting that it has been so thoroughly and thoughtfully responded to by the Board Member and CEB.

### **The Scrutiny Committee**

9. Since my last update to Council Scrutiny Committee meetings have been held on 30 January, 28 February and 27 March. The following items have been considered and the numbers of recommendations made to the Board and those agreed (either in full or in part) are given in brackets:
  - Oxford Flood Alleviation Scheme (0)
  - Graffiti prevention (0)
  - Recommendation Monitoring – Guest Houses (0)
  - Update on City Centre and Foresters Tower PSPOs (0)
  - Public safety and addressing antisocial behaviour on Oxford's waterways (1 / 1)
  - Performance monitoring – quarter 3 (0)
  - Police and Crime Panel update (2 / 2)
  - Workplace parking levies (2 / 2)
  - Air quality (3 / 3)
  - Refresh of Carbon Management Plan: 2017 – 2022 (2 / 2)
  - Corporate Plan 2017/2018 (1 / 1)
  - Grant Allocations to Community and Voluntary Organisations 2017/2018 (4 / 4)
  - Leisure Performance Update (0)

### **Housing Panel**

10. The Housing Panel met on 1 March 2017. The Panel agreed their report on university housing needs, which highlighted a number of suggested proposals relating to student and key worker housing for consideration as the local plan preferred options document is formulated. These suggestions were based on discussions with the two universities, Board Member and Council officers, and CEB have welcomed this contribution. The Panel have considered reports on the following:
  - University housing needs (1 / 1)
  - Housing performance (0)
  - Council support for people accessing the private rented sector (0)
  - Services for rough sleepers (0)
  - The allocation of homelessness prevention funds (0)

### **Finance Panel and Budget Review**

11. The Finance Panel's annual review of the Council budget has been concluded with sixteen recommendations to the City Executive Board, of which all but one were agreed. At meetings on 1 February 2017 and 29 March 2017 the Panel considered the following items:
- Budget 2017/18 (16 / 15)
  - The Implications of Brexit (1 / TBC)
  - Fundamental Service Reviews (0)
  - Treasury Management Strategy 2017/18 (0)

### **Looking ahead**

12. A Committee meeting will be held on 2 May 2017 where the Committee plan to look at CEB decisions on Fusion Lifestyle's Annual Service Plan, Community Leases and the Oxford Railway Station Supplementary Planning Document.
13. The special Scrutiny Committee meeting on 6 June will be the first of the year and, aside from the matter of electing a chair for the year, the Committee will be focused on the Local Plan Preferred Options decision. A further 'normal' meeting is being held two days later on 8 June 2017, at which the Committee will focus on its normal business and agreeing a work plan for the year ahead.
14. The Housing Panel meet on 26 April 2017 to review the progress of Council's Great Estates investments and tower block refurbishment project. The Panel will also consider any proposed changes to the Council's Empty Property Strategy.

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