

**To:** Council

**Date:** 26 November 2018

**Report of:** Chair of the Scrutiny Committee

**Title of Report:** Scrutiny briefing

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Council on the activities of the scrutiny function
<b>Key decision:</b>	No
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	Strong and Active Communities; An Efficient and effective Council
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Not applicable
<b>Recommendation(s): The Scrutiny Committee recommends Full Council to:</b>	
1. note the update report.	

**Appendices:** Appendix 1: Scrutiny work plan – November 2018

## Introduction

1. Since my last update, I can report that the Scrutiny function has considered or scheduled the majority of the items agreed for its Work Plan earlier this year (22 of 29). Officers have recently confirmed that they will be able to provide a 12 month update on progress made against the recommendations of the Oxford Living Wage Review Group, which completed its work in March this year. The Committee has also commissioned a report on the Council's approach to the prevention and removal of graffiti, which is due for consideration on 5 February 2019.

## Scrutiny Committee

2. Since my last regular Council update, the Scrutiny Committee held two meetings on 6 October and 6 November. The following items were considered at these meetings:
  - Oxford Draft Local Plan
  - The No Local Connection Review Group Draft Report
  - The Planning and Regulatory Service Improvement Plan
  - Staff Absence and Wellbeing

- The Annual Workforce Equalities Report.
3. A key recommendation made by the Scrutiny Committee in September 2018, which was not featured in my last update to Council, concerned the Council's oversight of Fusion Lifestyle's performance. The Committee expressed concern about the reliability of the data it was presented with at its meeting, after requesting to continue to monitor performance data on a quarterly basis.
  4. The Committee believe that in order to be effective in their respective roles, councillors and officers need to be able to access the right information, and to be assured of its accuracy. Accordingly, the Committee recommended to the City Executive to commission an audit of Fusion Lifestyle's financial and participation data, and the associated data collection methods, to assure itself of the reliability and accuracy of the quarterly performance information. This recommendation was subsequently accepted by the City Executive Board, and the Committee will next consider this issue on 4 December 2018.
  5. More recently, the Committee reviewed the draft Local Plan, which was subsequently agreed for consultation by Council on 17 October 2018. The Committee noted that the Plan is in its third year of development, and going out for a third public consultation, at this stage specifically concerning the soundness of the Plan. The Housing Policies were considered in addition by the Housing Panel on 11 October. It was noted by the Committee that recent adjustments in national projections for household formation and population data would not have a significant bearing on the content of the Plan, but that they may affect other matters such as the JSSP. The Board Member provided the Committee with assurance that the evidence base used for the Plan were sound in his view.
  6. Revisions to the draft Local Plan as a result of Scrutiny's involvement included:
    - Being clear that the Council supports and remains open to making use of new and innovative transport options for Oxford, in addition to bus and train links, for example.
    - Ensuring that appropriate energy standards are addressed during the planning application process for residential developments of less than 5 dwellings.
    - Separating Community-led housing and Self-build housing under two distinct sub-headings, and including the following sentence as a result of public contributions to the Housing Panel meeting: "Proposals for self-build housing will be supported as a way of enabling people to meet their own housing needs, particularly community-led collective self-build."
  7. The next Committee meeting will be held on 4 December where it will undertake an important review of the impact the Westgate Shopping Centre has had on the City. A number of external speakers have been secured for this meeting. The Committee will also consider the Planning Annual Monitoring Report in December.

#### **No Local Connection Review Group**

8. The No Local Connection Review Group has met seven times since it was established in July; the first Scrutiny Committee review group for 2018/19. This cross-party group was set up to review the Council's Local Connection Policy in relation to homelessness services, and the effect it has on those without a connection to the City. The review has involved a number of local service providers, national policy experts and people experiencing homelessness within the City. The Group has also received

evidence from 13 other local authorities on how they support people without a local connection.

9. The Review Group presented its draft report to the Scrutiny Committee meeting on 6 November for endorsement by the Committee, and any recommendations will be made to the City Executive Board on 14 November, after the publication of this council update. Key recommendations from the Review Group concern:

- Establishing Lifelong local connections for people born in Oxford
- Improving public communication about the Local Connection Policy
- Improving provision for pets in sheltered accommodation
- Recognising the need for a gendered accommodation policy
- Stays in prison, hospital or rehab should not affect a person's local connection
- Offering a local connection to long-term volunteers

On 14 November, the City Executive Board will decide whether or not to accept the recommendations of the review, and any implemented recommendations will be monitored by the Scrutiny Committee over the next year.

### **Housing Panel**

10. The Housing Panel met on 11 October and 12 November. Items considered included:

- The Draft Local Plan
- Sever Weather Emergency Protocol (SWEP) preparations for Winter
- Review of the Year one Homelessness Prevention Trailblazer
- Quarter Two Housing Performance

At the Housing Panel's request, officers prepared a report for their meeting on 12 November to explain what preparations were in place for SWEP over the 2018/19 winter period. The Housing Panel invited local service providers to contribute to this meeting, and invited feedback on last year's SWEP provision. The Panel has also asked for a report in March 2019 to evaluate how successful SWEP has been. The same meeting will consider options for establishing a Council-owned lettings agency. Separately, the Scrutiny Committee agreed on 6 November that the vacant post on the Housing Panel would not be appointed until after the by-election.

### **Finance Panel**

11. The Finance Panel met on 10 September, and considered the following items:

- Quarter One Budget Monitoring
- Treasury Management Annual Performance Report
- The Council Tax Reduction Scheme for 2019/20
- Legal Services Income Generation

In relation to Legal Services Income Generation, the Panel heard that the Oxfordshire Legal Hub had not provided the level of work that was expected, and Oxford City Council had picked up the majority of ad-hoc work coming from the Hub. Sources of income from other authorities had also reduced because of a preference for insourcing elsewhere. The Panel concluded that the market for income generation was limited.

In relation to the Council Tax Reduction Scheme, the Panel heard that the Scheme benefited approximately 8,500 households at an estimated cost to the Council of £1.4m for the current year and £1.7m from 2019/20. The Panel provided advice on

improving the consultation document to ensure the responses to the questions were better informed.

A key issue highlighted to the Panel in the Quarter One Budget Report centred on a reduction of £494,000 in car parking revenue (owing to competition from the Westgate Shopping Centre car park) and an underestimation in business rates from the Westgate leading to an additional £400,000 of recurring revenue income. These two significant changes in revenue are however offset broadly against one another.

The next meeting of the Finance Panel is on 6 December where the primary report concerns how the Council applies, or may better apply, social value judgements within its commissioning and procurement processes.

### **Companies Panel**

12. The Companies Panel met on 26 July and 13 November, and considered the following items:

- Appointment of Mazars as External Auditor to Oxford Direct Services (ODS)
- Presentation by Simon Howick and Aled Bath
- Oxford Direct Services Update Report

13. The Panel received the first quarterly update from ODS in July, which set out the headline objective for year one:

- Delivering the Medium Term Financial Plan
- Driving efficiency
- Maximising the work ODS could do for the Council
- Developing an organisation which could support ODS's ambition

14. The Panel heard that the TUPE transfer of 712 employees from the Council to ODS was successful, and that relations with the Trade Unions remain positive. Of the 38 internal Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), 35 were on target, with the remaining 3 being marginally missed.

15. In reviewing the financial data, the Panel decided to recommend to the Shareholder Group that it receives a more comprehensive scorecard of financial indicators as part of subsequent quarterly reports. The Panel also agreed to recommend that Councillor Community Infrastructure Levy projects, where appropriate, should use ODS as the preferred contractor to carry out the work. Both of these recommendations were subsequently agreed by the Shareholder.

16. The Companies Panel met on 13 November to consider the Managing Director's Half Year report, and a report seeking views on the appointment of Non-Executive Directors to the Board of Oxford Direct Services Limited and Oxford Direct Services Trading Limited.

Councillor Andrew Gant – Chair of the Scrutiny Committee  
Email: [cllragant@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:cllragant@oxford.gov.uk); Tel: 07545122560

Stefan Robinson – Scrutiny Officer  
Email: [srobinson@oxford.gov.uk](mailto:srobinson@oxford.gov.uk); Tel: 01865 252191