

**To:** Council

**Date:** 27 January 2020

**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>	An Efficient and Effective Council
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Corporate Plan 2016-2020
<b>Recommendation:</b> That Council resolves to note the update report.	

### **Appendices:**

Appendix 1: Scrutiny work plan – January 2020

Appendix 2a: Table of Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations from Cabinet meetings of 13 November and 19 December 2019

Appendix 2b (Restricted): Table of restricted Cabinet responses to Scrutiny recommendations from the Cabinet meeting of 19 December 2019

### **Introduction**

1. This update focuses on the activity of Scrutiny from late November 2019 to early January 2020.
2. Since the last update the Scrutiny function has been working hard, having launched two review groups to provide in-depth independent scrutiny on the Budget and the Climate Emergency. By the time of this report each will be significantly advanced having met on three occasions, more details about which can be found at the foot of this report.
3. As with much of the Council, the work of Scrutiny has needed to be flexible to manage the issues arising from the General Election in December. In line with enforced changes to the Cabinet timetable, a number of items of the Scrutiny workplan have been moved back to later in the year, including reports on Oxpens Lane, the Gender Pay Gap and the City Council Business Plan.

## Scrutiny Committee

4. Since the last meeting the Scrutiny Committee has held two meetings, on 17 December 2019 and 14 January 2020. The following items were considered at these meetings. For information, the outcomes of the meeting of 14 January 2020 will be discussed in the next update due to the meeting's proximity to the publication date for this update report.
  - Draft Corporate Strategy 2020-24 (six amendments as one recommendation made to 19 December Cabinet, all agreed)
  - Annual Monitoring Report 2018/19 (no recommendations)
  - Citizens' Assembly on Climate Change: Outcomes (no recommendations)
  - Planning for the 2020 Zero Emissions Zone (next report)
  - Go Ultra Low Pilot: Outcomes and Next Steps (next report)
  - Performance Monitoring: Quarter 2 (next report)
5. Recommendations regarding the Corporate Strategy tended to focus on making explicit positive aspects of the Council's activity that through familiarity may have become normalised or taken for granted: its work engaging residents, the 'Oxford Model', and the drive to reduce inequalities underpinning the Council's work, as well as comments to improve clarity for readers. All the amendments were adopted and changes have been incorporated into what is now the 'live' consultation document.
6. Whilst no recommendations arose from the reports on the Annual Monitoring Report and the Outcomes of the Citizens' Assembly both generated significant discussion and interest. Topics that generated particular discussion in regards to the former included the need to balance the access of local residents to housing with allowing the local universities to grow, and the amount of social housing delivered. With regards to the latter, the actions identified in response to the Citizens' Assembly were welcomed though there was a degree of challenge over the inclusion of existing programmes. Other key areas of discussion focused on how the Council might bring on board those more sceptical of the need for significant action, and the opportunities and challenges afforded by the particularly energising effect on Assembly Participants of the topic of biodiversity and 'greening' the City.

## Housing Panel

7. No meetings of the Housing Panel have taken place since the previous Scrutiny update report to Council. However, since the report Council has agreed to develop a report to follow up on the motion of 25 November to consider options for the introduction of an Oxford Living Rent which, should schedules allow, will be heard by the Housing Panel. In addition, the Housing Panel has requested a briefing on the challenges nationally of understanding hidden homelessness and the issue of overcrowding in Oxford's homes.
8. Housing Panel representatives also attended the Budget Review Group meeting on 08 January 2020 and contributed to discussion on the housing budget.
9. The next meeting of the Panel is on 5 March, where it will consider:

- Quarter 3 Housing Services Performance Report
- Private Rented Sector Housing

## **Finance Panel**

10. The Finance Panel met on 02 December 2019 and considered the following reports
  - Integrated Performance Report for Quarter 2 (no recommendations)
  - Treasury Mid-Year Report 2019/20 (no recommendations)
  - Property Investment Portfolio Analysis and Strategy Report (three recommendations made to 19 December Cabinet, all agreed)
11. No recommendations were made in regards to either the Integrated Performance Report or the Treasury Mid-Year Report 2019/20. However, both were subjected to significant scrutiny with particular discussion on the first focusing on the progress of the capital programme, the re-profiling of projects and the anticipated impact of the Project Management Office. Discussion on the latter focused on the balance of risk, return and asset diversification with support being given for enabling the Council to invest in multi-asset funds.
12. Whilst the detail of the discussion regarding the Council's Property Investment Portfolio Analysis and Strategy is commercially sensitive, the Finance Panel provided robust challenge to the underlying business case of the Council's future strategy. Recommendations made related to management of assets, criteria for future decision-making and governance structures. All three recommendations were agreed by Cabinet on 19 December 2019.
13. The Finance Panel's next meeting is scheduled for 29 January 2020, where it will consider the Treasury Management Strategy 2020/21, the Capital Strategy, a report on the Council's social value weighting of 5% in procurement, as well as the draft of the Scrutiny Budget Review Group report.

## **Companies Panel**

14. The Companies Panel met on 14 November 2019. Whilst it made no recommendations significant time was devoted discussion of the confidential detail of the OCHL Business Plan, OxWED update (on which there is a paper due to come to Cabinet and Scrutiny) and ODS activities.
15. The Companies Panel's next meeting is on 06 March 2020.

## **Scrutiny Review Groups**

### *Budget Review Group*

16. The Budget Review Group held two of its three scheduled substantive meetings on 06 and 08 January 2020. Senior Officers presented to members the budgetary proposals for their service areas, which were subjected to detailed questioning. Topics which have attracted particular scrutiny include the management of extraneous risks such the uncertainties of Brexit, a new government and reductions in business rate retention levels, as well as the Council's areas of increased

investment – the Climate Emergency and Homelessness Prevention – and its plans for generating income.

17. The final substantive meeting will have taken place by the time this report is presented to Council, being scheduled for 20 January 2020.
18. The draft final report for the Budget Review Group is scheduled to be considered for sign off by Scrutiny Committee on 04 February 2020 for consideration by Cabinet on 12 February 2020.

#### *Climate Emergency Review Group*

19. The Climate Emergency Review Group held three of its scheduled substantive meetings on 28 November, 16 December 2019 and 13 January 2020. The meetings to date have focused on the challenges of retrofitting (both for the Council with its own stock and more broadly), the Council's financial responses to the Citizens' Assembly, plans for the Council's non-HRA development capital spending, and issues around transport, energy generation and biodiversity. In support of the Review Group's work the Council has been fortunate to draw on the significant levels of expertise locally, with input from Councillors at neighbouring Vale of the White Horse District Council, Transition by Design, the Low Carbon Hub, Greencore Construction, Dr David Hancock Construction Director at the Infrastructure and Projects Authority of the Cabinet Office, Oxford Friends of the Earth, Oxford University Sustainability Team and Oxfordshire County Council.
20. Two further meetings, scheduled for 21 and 30 January 2020, will consider the Council's position in regards to new-builds, considering options for further reducing carbon in the Council's development plans, primarily in regards to housing, and also ways through its functions as a Planning and Building Inspection authority it can encourage wider uptake and implementation of reduced carbon building methods.
21. The Review Group has also organised a visit to the Springfield Meadows development in Southmoor on 24 January 2020, to which all Councillors and relevant Council officers have been invited. This local development is of particular relevance to the Council not simply because the houses are zero carbon, but because the cost of their development has been lower than that of traditional building methods, potentially giving the Council a means to ease the trade-offs it faces when in the design and build of new Council stock.
22. The draft final report for the Climate Emergency Review Group is scheduled to be considered for sign off by Scrutiny Committee on 03 March 2020 for consideration by Cabinet on 11 March 2020.

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