

To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 6 October 2021
Report of: Susan Sale, Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Child Poverty Review Group

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To update the Committee on the status of the Review Group and make arrangements for the next stages
Corporate Priority:	Safe, Healthy Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-24
Recommendation(s): That the Committee resolves to:	
1. Agree the draft scope, having made any necessary amendments	
2. Agree to invite the County Council to undertake a joint Review Group	
3. Agree the membership level and accept the nominations for membership	
4. Agree a Chair (or lead member) for the Review Group	
5. Note that further amendments may be required in the event of a joint review, and agree that such changes be delegated to the Chair in discussion with the Scrutiny Officer	

Appendices	
Appendix 1	Draft Review Group scope

Introduction and Background

1. Each year the Scrutiny Committee undertakes a 'deep dive' into a topic of particular concern to its members over a course of multiple meetings through a Review Group. At its August 2021 meeting it was agreed that the topic for Review Group for the current civic year would be Child Poverty.

Agreeing the Draft Scope

2. Attached to this report is a draft scope for this Review Group, which seeks to clarify what the Review Group seeks to achieve and how it aims to do so. Although

participation in a Review Group does not require a member to be part of the Scrutiny function, Scrutiny nonetheless 'owns' the Review Group and its final report and recommendations to Cabinet. As such, the Committee is asked to review the draft Review Group Scope attached as Appendix 1 to ensure that what is proposed will deliver the outcomes wanted by the Committee from the Review Group.

3. The Committee should be aware that members of the Review Group are also given an opportunity to shape the scope, meaning that what is agreed may be modified slightly. This is for a number of reasons. Review Group members may not be on Scrutiny but are expected to have areas of particular interest and/or knowledge, so it is important that they are given the opportunity to contribute towards the shape of the work they will be undertaking. Likewise, the scope does seek to agree some practical specifics, such as meeting timings, which are more pertinent to Review Group members than the wider Scrutiny Committee. Changes are expected to be fairly small.

Potential Involvement of the County Council

4. Because Review Groups afford more time and resource to look at a topic, oftentimes the topic looked at is fairly big, with multiple stakeholders being responsible for different areas. This is not a problem; one way to cut a big topic down to a manageable size is to focus on the elements which are within the sole or significant control of the City Council. Recent Review Groups have, for example, looked at topics including the Climate Emergency and Domestic Abuse and have followed exactly this approach. Doing so has the benefit that the issues looked at, and therefore the recommendations made, are within the purview of the City Council, meaning the Review Group's work is more likely to lead to concrete change.
5. The topic chosen for this Review Group, child poverty, is similarly wide-ranging, and is one where the City Council does not necessarily control the primary levers for change. It could, as previously, take the approach of focusing on its own sphere of activity and influence. An alternative, however, would be to work with other stakeholders to undertake a joint review, in the hope of providing a coordinated response with those who do control the primary levers. In this case, the most obvious candidate would be the County Council, who hold responsibility for a number of pertinent areas including education, safeguarding and public health. With the recent change of administration at the County Council, the barriers to fruitful joint-working may be reduced. Very preliminary discussions with officers at the County Council have met with positive responses, though no agreement has been reached. The Committee is asked whether it wishes to pursue this idea further.
6. A joint review with the County Council would have impacts on the details of the scope. Consequently, the scope has been colour-coded to indicate what might happen with a City-Council only Review Group, and what with a County Council one. The Committee is asked to note that should it wish to undertake a joint Review Group further changes may be requested by the County Council members and to agree that the decision whether to agree to these suggestions should be delegated to the Chair of the Review Group and the Scrutiny Officer.

Appointment of Members and Chair

7. The rules around membership of Review Groups are governed by the Scrutiny Operating Principles agreed by the Committee at the start of the civic year, which now form Annex 1 to Part 8 of the Council's Constitution.
8. Historically, Review Groups have tended to have a membership of six, which has worked well to balance the need to have a broad range of perspectives with enough time for each member to explore fully the issues before them. Fewer than six and issues around a quorum become more pressing, as substitutes are not permitted. It is therefore recommended that the Review Group have six members.
9. The recommendation above, however, is clouded slightly by the possibility of doing a joint Review Group with the County Council. If the City and the County were both to have six members the group would be unwieldy and there would be insufficient time for individual members to explore the issues and bring their own experience and knowledge to bear. Should there be a joint Review Group, it is recommended that number be cut to four. The Committee is asked to accept the nominations by political groups for both those eventualities.
10. Under the Scrutiny Operating Principles agreed, membership of Review Groups is cross-party with the following break-downs:

4 Members	6 Members
2 Labour	3 Labour
1 Liberal Democrat	2 Liberal Democrat
1 Green	1 Green

11. Members of Review Groups may be any non-executive member; they are not required to be members of the Scrutiny Committee or any of its Panels. Though not a requirement, in the event that a joint Review were to be undertaken it would be preferable from a perspective of clarity over who an individual is representing if they are not simultaneously a City and County Councillor.
12. Though Review Group membership is not required to be drawn from the Scrutiny Committee, the importance of the Chair's role as a bridge between the Review Group and the Committee means that it is preferable that they be a member of the Scrutiny Committee. It should be noted that should a joint Review be undertaken there is the possibility that the County Council may wish the Chair to come from its membership. In this case, the person appointed Chair by the Committee will retain the Review Group – Scrutiny communication role.
13. An issue to bring to the Committee's attention is that the meetings are scheduled for earlier than is usually the case, 5pm rather than 6pm. This is on the back of feedback from prospective members, who have expressed a wish to begin earlier. As referenced above, the timings of meetings are not set in stone but potential members should at least note the possibility that meetings will be earlier than usual.

Report author	Tom Hudson
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Job title	Scrutiny Officer
Service area or department	Law and Governance
Telephone	01865 252191
e-mail	thudson@oxford.gov.uk