

**To:** Council

**Date:** 21 March 2022

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

**Title of Report:** Scrutiny briefing to Council

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Council on the activities of the Scrutiny function
<b>Corporate Priority:</b>	All
<b>Policy Framework:</b>	Council Strategy 2020-24
<b>Recommendation:</b>	That Council resolves to note the update report.

<b>Appendices</b>
None

## Introduction

1. This report covers the activity of Scrutiny during the period from to 30 January 2022 to 11 March 2022. Within this timeframe there have been relatively few meetings of Scrutiny and its Panels. Owing to timetabling and other considerations the only Scrutiny report to have been taken to Cabinet during this period and received a response by the time of publication is the Scrutiny Budget Review Group report, which has already been noted by Council at its Budget Council meeting. As such, this update is very short.
2. This is not to say, however, that Scrutiny has not been working since the last update. A total of eight reports are set to be sent to Cabinet after publication of this report. In addition, the Child Poverty Review Group has completed its evidence-gathering, though the report is currently being drafted and, again, will be reported on in the next update, or perhaps later if a longer time is requested to make a response to its recommendations.

## **Scrutiny Committee**

3. Since the last Scrutiny update to Council the Scrutiny Committee has met three times, on 01 February, an extraordinary meeting on 02 March, and 07 March 2022. Two reports from Scrutiny's meeting prior to the last update were expected to be reported in this update. For a number of reasons – redrafting, illness, Cabinet member absence and proximity to Cabinet meetings – none of the reports produced by Scrutiny to Cabinet have yet officially been responded to. Council will be updated on this in its next update instead.
4. These reports are:
  - Climate Emergency Review Group Update Report
  - Procurement Update
  - Oxfordshire 2050 Plan
  - Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy
  - Allocation of Homelessness Prevention Funding
  - Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptation Policy
  - Annual Business Plan Update
  - Oxfordshire Recovery and Renewal Framework

## **Housing and Homelessness Panel**

5. The Housing and Homelessness Panel has met once during the reporting period, on 02 February. This meeting focused on the ongoing investigations into Tenant Involvement and Empowerment, specifically focusing on the Council's progress in responding to the STAR Tenant Satisfaction Survey and its preparation for the Social Housing White Paper being made law. The report on this is currently being drafted and is expected to be presented to Cabinet in April.

## **Finance and Performance Panel**

6. The Finance and Performance Panel has not met during the reporting period. Its final meeting of the civic year was held on 28 January.

## **Companies Panel**

7. Meetings of the Companies Panel are on a four-monthly cycle, meaning the Companies Panel has not met during this reporting period.

## **Review Groups**

8. In February Scrutiny delivered its Budget Review Group report to Cabinet. Council has already noted this document at its Budget Council meeting so only a brief update is given. Of the 22 recommendations made, only one was rejected. This is largely a function of the recognition of the financial challenge the Council faces and the majority of recommendations seeking to clarify or mitigate risk rather than proposing alternative policy.

9. The Child Poverty Review Group has met six times since the last update to Council and has concluded its evidence-gathering. The report is currently being drafted and is scheduled to be presented to Cabinet's April meeting with a response sought after the election.

### **Planning for Next Year**

10. As part of its work programme Scrutiny seeks to consider a balance of Cabinet reports and reports it commissions itself on topics of particular interest. The Committee seeks ideas not only from its own membership, but from all Councillors. Members will therefore be contacted with a request for ideas that Scrutiny should look at in due course. These ideas will then help form the longlist of possible topics adopted by Scrutiny for its 2022/23 work plan.
11. Feedback about Scrutiny has generally been positive over the year, and the general sense is that the Scrutiny function has been of value to the decision-making and governance processes of the Council. However, to test this and identify areas of potential improvement, in April all Scrutiny and Cabinet members will be asked to fill in a short evaluation form developed by the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny. It is important that Scrutiny add value to the work of the Council, so relevant members are asked to ensure they respond to it in order to provide a strong evidential base for possible changes. Feedback is of course also welcomed outside of this format. The Chair or the Scrutiny Officer are happy to take any feedback on board.

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