

Minutes of a meeting of the Scrutiny Committee on Tuesday 12 April 2022

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Committee members present:

Councillor Wade (Chair)	Councillor Chapman (Vice-Chair)
Councillor Corais	Councillor Djafari-Marbini
Councillor Dunne	Councillor Fry
Councillor Smowton	Councillor Tidball
Councillor Thomas	

Officers present for all or part of the meeting:

Liz Jones, Interim ASBIT Team Leader
Tom Hudson, Scrutiny Officer
Alice Courtney, Committee and Member Services Officer

Also present:

Councillor Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford

Apologies:

Councillor(s) Linda Smith and Waite sent apologies.

121. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

122. Chair's Announcements

The Committee agreed to take agenda item 5, Domestic Abuse Review Recommendations Update immediately after agenda item 3, Chair's Announcements and then return to the items as listed.

The Chair had no announcements, but invited the Scrutiny Officer to inform the Committee that this would be his last meeting as he was leaving the Council. The Chair and Committee congratulated the Scrutiny Officer on his new role and thanked him for his contributions to the work of the Committee.

123. Domestic Abuse Review Recommendations Update

Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for a Safer, Healthy Oxford introduced the report, which provided an update on the recommendations made by the Committee. In particular, she highlighted that:

- Most of the recommendations had been agreed by Cabinet and a substantial number were already completed.
- The Council was working towards Domestic Abuse Housing Alliance (DAHA) Accreditation which would take a year or two to achieve and a number of the Committee's recommendations would be completed as part of that process.
- The Council had been awarded funding for two Domestic Abuse Housing Link Workers who would support complex domestic abuse cases through the housing pathway.

Liz Jones, ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead highlighted a number of points, including:

- That the Council was taking a whole Council approach to Domestic Abuse support.
- That the DAHA Accreditation sought to delve into every aspect of work the Council does with victims and perpetrators of Domestic Abuse, which was why the process was lengthy.
- That, in relation to recommendation 3 (relating to Domestic Abuse perpetrator programmes) there was a perpetrator programme through Oxfordshire County Council Children's Social Care which was piloting a whole family approach to supporting Domestic Abuse across the county.
- That it was hoped extended support for perpetrators to address their behaviour would be achieved through the revised service specification for the tender for Domestic Abuse services in Oxfordshire.
- That housing was a key issue for victims wanting to flee Domestic Abuse. The Council was bound by legislation but committed to taking a needs-based approach.
- That the Council was committed to driving the Domestic Abuse support agenda forward, including work to better embed support for children.

Cllr Tidball joined the meeting.

The Scrutiny Officer advised that, given the next Cabinet meeting was due to take place tomorrow, there would not be enough time to produce formal written recommendations for consideration at that meeting. He said that the Committee should consider submitting any recommendations informally via the Cabinet Member.

The Committee raised a number of points in relation to the update report, including:

- *Recommendation 14* – in response to a query about why this recommendation was not agreed by Cabinet, the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead confirmed that the Council was bound by legislation which prevented this recommendation being agreed.
- *Recommendation 15* – responding to questions, the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead said she felt the Council tenancy clauses regarding Domestic Abuse were strong enough, but said they could be strengthened further. The Committee asked if the clauses in Council tenancy agreements could be revisited. Cllr Upton added that she thought the recommendation was not agreed as the Council had no power to require private landlords to insert specific clauses into their tenancy agreements.

Cllr Djafari-Marbini joined the meeting.

- *Domestic Abuse training for officers* – the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead said that the COVID-19 pandemic may have caused a lower turnout at officer training, but that additional sessions would be organised and the relevant officers would be mandated to attend. She added that this training could not be mandated for all officers across the Council, but provided reassurance that Managers were pushing attendance with relevant officers.
- *Explanations where recommendations were not agreed* – the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead informed the Committee that she had removed explanations where recommendations were not agreed from the report to make it easier to read.
- *Recommendation 21* – the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead confirmed that opportunities for ESOL classes were perceived as a bigger problem than in reality and that was why recommendation 21 was only agreed in part. She confirmed that she would be doing more work in this area in due course.

The Chair thanked Cllr Upton and the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead for attending to present the report.

The Committee noted the contents of the report.

Cllr Upton and the ASBIT Manager and Domestic Abuse Lead left the meeting and did not return.

124. Minutes

The Committee resolved to APPROVE the minutes of the extraordinary meeting held on 02 March 2022 and the minutes of the ordinary meeting held on 07 March 2022 as a true and accurate record.

125. Reports for Approval

The Scrutiny Officer introduced the following reports:

- DSS Discrimination Motion Update
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report

The Scrutiny Officer advised that progress against actions related to the DSS Discrimination Motion passed by Council was on track and all actions had been completed apart from the establishment of a tenants' forum – although progress had been made. Following discussion, the Committee agreed that the tenants' forum, once established, should be given the option to split into a Council tenants' forum and a private tenants' forum if it was felt appropriate by the forum itself, as there was recognition that the needs of each distinct group would be different. It was suggested that the management of the forum should be made aware of the potential tensions and differing needs between private and Council tenants so that conversations about splitting into two forums could be facilitated as the group developed.

In relation to the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report, the Scrutiny Officer provided an overview of the key messages contained in the report and said that the Council was doing a lot of good work in this area.

Cllr Corais joined the meeting.

The Committee discussed the need to strengthen arrangements for tenants and suggested it would be good to have a tenant champion for different areas of the City

who knew the area and could support tenants with any issues (e.g. repairs). The Committee also discussed the use of language in Council reports and expressed a desire to move away from the use of corporate terms such as 'client' or 'customer' (as the Council was not a business) and instead use the term 'resident' and 'Council'. In addition, concern was raised that contacting repair companies was difficult. It was also noted that the report highlighted younger generations were the least satisfied with the Council's work.

The Committee approved the following reports for submission to Cabinet:

- DSS Discrimination Motion Update
- Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report (*subject to client/customer/corporation references being amended to reflect 'resident' and 'Council'*)

126. Report back on recommendations and from Scrutiny Panel meetings

The Chair presented the report on recommendations and asked the Committee for its views on whether it considered the 'recommendations agreed/not agreed by Cabinet' column in the recommendation reports was required and whether the Committee should look to develop a form of metric to replace the yes/no recording.

Members advised that they thought the column was useful and added that one of the most valuable parts of the report was the explanation column for why the recommendation was agreed or not by Cabinet.

In addition, Members said that it would be useful for future reports submitted to Scrutiny Committee for consideration if there was an indication of where the Committee was able to have input in terms of making recommendations, as there were some occasions where the Committee's scope for making recommendations was limited and it would be useful to know this before reading the report. It was suggested that knowing where the Committee could have input would also help guide discussion at meetings.

Cllr Chapman left the meeting and did not return.

The Committee agreed to defer further discussion on these issues to the next meeting.

The Committee noted the report back on recommendations.

There was no report back on recent Scrutiny Panel meetings as the Chairs of the Housing & Homelessness Panel and Companies Scrutiny Panel were not present.

127. Dates of future meetings for 2022/23

The dates of future meetings were noted:

- 08 June 2022
- 05 July 2022
- 02 August 2022
- 06 September 2022
- 11 October 2022

- 07 November 2022
- 05 December 2022
- 16 January 2023
- 01 February 2023
- 06 March 2023
- 04 April 2023

Standing Panels

Housing & Homelessness: 04 July 2022; 06 October 2022; 03 November 2022; 02 March 2023; 24 April 2023

Finance & Performance: 07 July 2022; 07 September 2022; 07 December 2022; 23 January 2023; 28 March 2023

It was noted that a decision as to whether the meeting on 08 June 2022 would be held in-person or remotely would be made nearer to the date of the meeting.

The Chair thanked the Committee and officers for their contributions to the work of the Scrutiny Committee over the past year.

The meeting started at 5.00 pm and ended at 6.02 pm

Chair

Date: Wednesday 8 June 2022

When decisions take effect:

Cabinet: after the call-in and review period has expired

Planning Committees: after the call-in and review period has expired and the formal decision notice is issued

All other committees: immediately.

Details are in the Council’s Constitution.

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