

**To:** Council

**Date:** 18 July 2022

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

**Title of Report:** Scrutiny Committee Update Report

<b>Summary and recommendations</b>	
<b>Purpose of report:</b>	To update Council on the activities of the Scrutiny function
<b>Scrutiny Lead Member:</b>	Councillor Dr Chris Smowton, Chair of the Scrutiny Committee
<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 provides an update on Scrutiny activity during the period from 12 March 2022 to 30 June 2022.
2. During the period from 12 March 2022 to the end of the 2021/22 municipal year there were relatively few meetings of the Scrutiny Committee and its Panels. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in March and April 2022:

### *March 2022*

- Climate Emergency Review Group Update
- Equality, Diversity & Inclusion Strategy
- Allocation of Preventing Homelessness Grant 2022/23
- Housing Assistance and Disabled Adaptations Policy

- Oxford City Council Corporate Business Plan 2022
- Oxfordshire Recovery and Renewal Framework

*April 2022*

- Procurement Update
  - Oxfordshire 2050 Plan
  - DSS Discrimination Motion Update
  - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report
3. Most of the reports submitted in March and April received Cabinet responses, the majority of which were positive. The response to the Tenant Involvement and Empowerment report was delayed as a result of the departure of the Scrutiny Officer. A response is expected at Cabinet in July 2022.

### **Scrutiny Committee 2022/23**

4. Since the start of the 2022/23 municipal year up to 30 June 2022, the Scrutiny Committee has met once, on 08 June 2022. At this meeting a new Chair, Councillor Dr Chris Smowton was elected – taking on the role from former Councillor Liz Wade. Councillor Lizzy Diggins was elected Vice-Chair.
5. The Committee agreed to establish the same three standing panels as in previous years: Housing & Homelessness, Finance & Performance, and Companies Scrutiny Panel. Recommended changes to the way in which Companies Scrutiny Panel operates were noted; namely that Companies Scrutiny Panel will join Shareholder and Joint Venture Group meetings as non-voting members to enable more effective and efficient scrutiny of the Shareholder function. These meetings will not be clerked by the Scrutiny Officer, meaning there is capacity within the Scrutiny function for other work. The membership of the Finance & Performance Panel and Companies Scrutiny Panel were reduced from six members to four.
6. The membership of the standing panels is as follows:
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| <b>Housing &amp; Homelessness Panel:</b> | Councillor Paula Dunne (Chair), Councillor Lizzy Diggins, Councillor Laurence Fouweather, Councillor Jabu Nala-Hartley, Councillor Rosie Rawle, Councillor Jo Sandelson |
| <b>Finance &amp; Performance Panel:</b>  | Councillor James Fry (Chair), Councillor Chris Jarvis, Councillor Tom Landell Mills, Councillor Dr Amar Latif   |
| <b>Companies Scrutiny Panel:</b>         | Councillor Mike Rowley (Chair), Councillor James Fry, Councillor Tom Landell Mills, Councillor Alistair Morris  |
7. There was a suggestion from the Committee that a Climate & Environment Panel should be established; a report is expected to be considered by the Committee in July 2022 seeking the formal establishment of this new standing panel, with a more detailed report on its remit to be submitted to a future meeting. The Committee is also expected to consider establishing a Budget Review Group at its next meeting in July 2022. If both proposals are agreed, capacity for one additional review group

(five meetings) would remain, as a result of the changes to Companies Scrutiny Panel arrangements.

8. In addition to the agreement of the Scrutiny Operating Principles for 2022/23, four substantive reports were considered on 08 June 2022:
  - Report of the Child Poverty Review Group
  - Waterways Update (*Scrutiny-commissioned report*)
  - Oxford's Economic Strategy – Consultation Report and Recommendations (*Cabinet report*)
  - City Centre Action Plan – Consultation Report and Recommendations (*Cabinet report*)
9. The Child Poverty Review Group produced a cross-cutting report urging action to address child poverty in Oxford City. The draft report was finalised at the beginning of the 2022/23 municipal year, setting out 42 recommendations. The report focused on what more the Council could do to embed poverty prevention methods into Council activity; along with how the Council might work with partners and local anchor institutions on a collaborative response. A key recommendation within the report was that of the Council adopting the Socio-economic Duty and lobbying other local organisations to do the same. The report recognised the work that the Council is already doing, but noted that more could be done to bring the issue of child poverty to the forefront. At its meeting on 08 June 2022, the Scrutiny Committee endorsed the work of the Child Poverty Review Group and approved the report for submission to Cabinet.
10. The Waterways Report was a Scrutiny-commissioned report which provided an update on recommendations made by the Committee in November 2020. Priorities had shifted during the time since then due to a number of health and safety issues which had been identified and taken high priority. The Committee welcomed the report and expects to produce a report to Cabinet with recommendations based on the discussion at the meeting, which is anticipated will be submitted to Cabinet in July 2022. During discussions on water quality, the Committee expressed a desire to invite representatives from Thames Water to a future meeting to present water quality data and answer questions.
11. The report on Oxford's Economic Strategy aimed to address existing planned growth, as set out in Local Plans, and ensure that growth would be inclusive. The Committee's discussion largely focused on the need for effective engagement with diverse communities, particularly minoritised groups and young people, as part of consultation processes and engaging with wider stakeholders (e.g. Trade Unions and the Third Sector). A total of 9 recommendations were agreed.
12. The report on the City Centre Action Plan was introduced as a community-owned plan that encouraged feedback into the future and would add structure, momentum and ownership. Again, the Committee's discussion focused on effective engagement with diverse communities, particularly minoritised groups and young people, and ensuring that the Plan is adaptive to diverse needs. A total of 4 recommendations were agreed.

## **Cabinet Responses to Recommendations: June 2022**

13. The following reports were submitted to Cabinet in June 2022:
- Report of the Child Poverty Review Group
  - Oxford's Economic Strategy – Consultation Report and Recommendations
  - City Centre Action Plan – Consultation Report and Recommendations
14. Due to the length and cross-cutting nature of the Child Poverty Review Group report, Cabinet responses to recommendations are expected at a future meeting.
15. All recommendations contained in the Oxford's Economic Strategy and City Centre Action Plan reports received positive responses.

### **Housing and Homelessness Panel**

16. The Housing and Homelessness Panel has met once during the reporting period, on 22 March 2022. The following reports were considered and submitted to the Scrutiny Committee for approval before submission to Cabinet:
- DSS Discrimination Motion Update
  - Tenant Involvement and Empowerment Report

### **Finance and Performance Panel**

17. The Finance and Performance Panel has not met during the reporting period.

### **Companies Scrutiny Panel**

18. The Companies Scrutiny Panel has met twice as a standalone panel during the reporting period, on 28 March and 07 April 2022, to consider reports relating to Oxford City Housing Limited, Barton Oxford LLP, OxWED LLP and Oxford Direct Services. Commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.
19. In addition, the Companies Scrutiny Panel joined the Shareholder and Joint Venture meeting as non-voting members on 22 June 2022 to consider reports relating to Oxford City Housing Limited, Barton Oxford LLP and OxWED LLP. This was the first meeting under the new operating arrangements which are intended to enable more effective and efficient scrutiny of the Shareholder function. Again, commercial confidentiality prevents the provision of a summary report.

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