

To: Scrutiny Committee
Date: 07 November 2022
Report of: Head of Law and Governance
Title of Report: Climate and Environment Standing Panel: Remit, Proposed Business, Membership, and Meeting Dates

Summary and recommendations	
Purpose of report:	To recommend proposals relating to the constitution of the Climate & Environment Panel to the Standing Committee
Key decision:	No
Corporate Priority:	Pursue a Zero Carbon Oxford
Policy Framework:	Council Strategy 2020-2024
Recommendation(s): That the Scrutiny Committee resolves to:	
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Agree the remit, proposed business, and meeting dates of the Climate and Environment Panel as set out in the report; 2. Agree a Chair (or lead member) for the Climate and Environment Panel; 3. Receive nominations for membership from political groups and agree the membership of the Climate and Environment Panel (4 members) 	

Introduction and background

1. At its meeting on 05 July 2022, the Scrutiny Committee resolved to:
 - a. Agree to establish a Climate & Environment Panel, noting that the remit, proposed business, and meeting dates will be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting;
 - b. Defer agreement of a Chair (or lead member) for the Climate & Environment Panel to a future Scrutiny Committee meeting;
 - c. Agree the membership level (4) of the Climate & Environment Panel and invite nominations for membership from political groups, to be agreed at a future Scrutiny Committee meeting.

Membership

2. Noting the Committee's resolution of 05 July, the Scrutiny Operating Principles 2022/23 (Annex 1 to Part 8 of Oxford City Council's Constitution) state that the political composition of Standing Panels with a membership level of four shall be two (2) Labour; one (1) Lib Dem; one (1) Green.

3. The Panel Chair can be from any political group and is accountable to the Scrutiny Committee.
4. No substitutions are permitted on the Panel and the quorum for Panel meetings is two (2) members.
5. As detailed in the Scrutiny Operating Principles 2022/23, at the discretion of the Scrutiny Committee, residents and other specialists may be co-opted as non-voting members of the Standing Panel, as the subject matter dictates for a period ending no later than the day of the first meeting of the next Council year. The Committee may discontinue an appointment at any time.

Remit and business

6. Given Oxford City Council's commitments to Zero Carbon, it is proposed that the Climate & Environment Panel be a cross-party Standing Panel established by the Scrutiny Committee to scrutinise progress in delivering existing climate and environment workstreams and to consider their effectiveness. This might include considering Cabinet reports with a clear climate or environmental focus; and reviewing regular performance reports and the delivery of strategies, policies and projects already adopted.
7. The Council was one of the first to declare a climate emergency (2019) and convened the first Citizen's Assembly in the UK on the topic of climate change. The Scrutiny Committee established a Climate Emergency Review Group in October 2019 to review the avenues by which the Council might reduce carbon emissions from the largest contributor in the city: buildings. The Review Group reported to Cabinet in March 2020 on its findings and presented 56 recommendations. Cabinet agreed its responses to the recommendations at its meeting in March 2021. Following the Review Group recommendations, updates on the Zero Carbon Action Plan were presented to the Scrutiny Committee in January 2022; it is recommended that any future updates are provided to the Climate & Environment Panel rather than the Scrutiny Committee.
8. Professor Nick Eyre, the Council's Independent Scientific Advisor has previously offered a view on the four priority areas for the Council to reach net zero and has suggested that it may be of benefit for the Panel to focus on those areas identified as priorities. It is recommended that Prof Nick Eyre be invited to address the Panel at its first meeting to advise the Panel on what he considers the Council's priorities should be and where realistic limitations are; and suggest how Scrutiny input may be best placed.
9. In July 2022, the Council's Audit & Governance Committee considered an [internal audit progress report](#) produced by BDO. The audit reviewed the work which was underway in order for the Council to achieve net zero. Alongside positive findings, a number of action areas were identified, which have been brought together (along with the Council's wider net zero actions) in a Net Zero Masterplan document. The Masterplan seeks to provide an overview of all Council commitments, timelines, project leads and resource allocations/issues related to the Council's net zero

ambitions for the financial years 2022/23 and 2023/24 in one document. A Net Zero Steering Group has been established to take ownership of the Masterplan and quarterly updates on the Masterplan will be reported to the steering group. It is proposed that the information considered at the Net Zero Steering Group be subsequently considered by the Panel with the opportunity for recommendations to be made to Cabinet.

10. The Scrutiny Committee has previously received periodic updates on Oxford's Waterways and the Annual Air Quality Status Report. It is recommended that future updates on both are provided to the Panel rather than to the Scrutiny Committee. The Panel may also wish to consider how well the Council works with communities and community groups to enact the behaviour change needed to address climate change; it is also recommended that work on active travel and its impact on reducing emissions be reported to the Panel.
11. At its meeting on 08 June 2022, the Scrutiny Committee agreed to commission an item related to water quality in the waterways; inviting representatives from Thames Water, the Environment Agency and Thames 21 to present data and answer questions. This has not yet been scheduled into the Committee's Work Plan, therefore it is recommended that this piece of work be undertaken by the Panel.
12. In addition, the Panel may wish to consider the biodiversity action plan. Whilst the biodiversity action plan focuses on parks, work has begun on producing a broader biodiversity strategy/action plan for the City as a whole. It is recommended that the Panel be given the opportunity to input into the production of this document before its adoption, once sufficient progress has been made. If the Panel is reconstituted in subsequent years, it is recommended that the Panel periodically reviews progress against this strategy/action plan.
13. If enacted, the Environment Act (secondary legislation) will impose duties on councils to report to Government on their actions to conserve and enhance biodiversity on a five year basis, with the first report expected within two years of the legislation coming into force. It is anticipated that the Council would aim to align this reporting with any reporting from the future biodiversity strategy/action plan, to reduce duplication. It is proposed that this information could also be reported to the Panel, if it is reconstituted in subsequent municipal years.
14. Headline questions that the Panel may wish to explore, taken from the Centre for Governance and Scrutiny's [10 questions to ask if you're scrutinising climate change](#)¹, include:
 - a. How well does the Council understand the need to take action locally?
 - b. How does the Council's leadership champion and direct action on climate change?
 - c. How is the Council adopting a clear and detailed strategic plan, and how is it mainstreaming climate change mitigation and adaptation?
 - d. Has the Council reviewed its investment strategy, supply chains, and procurement models to give due consideration to climate change impacts?

- e. How is the Council integrating sustainability and resilience into its transport and energy plans?
- f. How is the Council planning to understand and act on the need to adapt existing properties and estates to address the impacts of climate change and to plan for new housing stock which is resilient to these impacts?
- g. How is the Council promoting climate education, diversifying the labour market, and focusing on sectors that are sustainable?
- h. What measures are being taken to ensure that health and social care systems will be resilient with the extra pressures they will come under due to climate change?
- i. How does the Council identify those who are most at risk from the impacts of climate change, and what is being done to assist the most vulnerable?
- j. How is the Council supporting and working with all relevant private and civic actors in the area towards climate change mitigation and adaptation?

Evidence

15. Key witnesses to include but not be limited to:

- a. Cllr Susan Brown, Leader (and Chair of Zero Carbon Oxford Partnership)
- b. Cllr Nigel Chapman, Cabinet Member for Citizen Focused Services
- c. Cllr Alex Hollingsworth, Cabinet Member for Planning and Housing Delivery
- d. Cllr Chewe Munkonge, Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Leisure and Parks
- e. Cllr Imogen Thomas, Cabinet Member for Zero Carbon Oxford and Climate Justice
- f. Cllr Louise Upton, Cabinet Member for Health and Transport
- g. Ian Brooke, Head of Community Services
 - i. Chris Bell, Green and Blue Spaces Development Manager
 - ii. Michael Woods, Oxford Waterways Coordinator
- h. Mish Tullar, Head of Corporate Strategy
 - i. Rose Dickinson, Carbon Reduction Team Manager
 - ii. Prof Nick Eyre, Scientific Adviser to the Council
 - iii. Mai Jarvis, Environmental Quality Team Manager
- i. Carolyn Ploszynski, Head of Regeneration and Economy
- j. Jane Winfield, Head of Corporate Property and Assets
 - i. Malcolm Peek, Property Service Manager

Meetings

16. Given that the Panel is being constituted partway through the municipal year, it is recommended that the Panel meets two or three times during 2022/23.

17. The decision around whether to reconstitute the Panel in 2023/24 will be a matter for the Scrutiny Committee to consider at the start of the 2023/24 municipal year.

18. It is recommended that Panel meeting dates are sought in consultation with the Panel Chair and other Panel Members.

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Background Papers: None

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