

AUDIT COMMITTEE – 3 MARCH 2010

CIPFA GUIDANCE AND SCRUTINY

Report by Head of Strategy

Background

1. CIPFA have published guidance to audit committees in their publication Audit Committees, Practical Guidance for Local Authorities. As part of this guidance CIPFA recommend that an audit committee should:
 - (a) Have clear right of access to committees, including scrutiny committees; and
 - (b) Ensure that it is aware of the work of scrutiny and other committees so that it can take account of issues relevant to its areas of interest.
2. This report sets out to present the current scrutiny structure, how the work programme of scrutiny committees is decided and arrangements to ensure the CIPFA guidance is met.

Scrutiny Structure

3. There are currently six Scrutiny Committees:
 - (a) Adult Services
 - (b) Children's Services
 - (c) Growth & Infrastructure
 - (d) Safer & Stronger Communities
 - (e) Strategy & Partnership
 - (f) Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee¹
4. The remit of each committee is reflected in its name. Annex 1 gives further details on the remit of each committee.
5. Within their terms of reference, each Scrutiny Committee will:
 - (a) review and/or scrutinise decisions made or actions taken in connection with the discharge of any of the Council's functions;
 - (b) make reports and/or recommendations to the Council and/or the Cabinet in connection with the discharge of any functions;
 - (c) consider any matter affecting the area or its inhabitants;

¹ It should be noted that the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee is a joint committee with district councils.

- (d) exercise the right to call in, for reconsideration, decisions made but not yet implemented by or on behalf of the Cabinet.
6. Committees may undertake work through a number of methods, for example:
- (a) Review work – a review sub-group is chosen from the full committee to examine a particular issue through interviews with relevant officers and stakeholders and desk-based research. The work is written up into a formal report with recommendations made to the Cabinet and other relevant bodies.
 - (b) Select Committees – A single event in which officers, subject experts and other relevant stakeholders are called in for a detailed select committee styled debate to understand and progress the issue. Bringing all stakeholders together for a joined-up discussion often allows the issue to be progressed quickly.
 - (c) Question and Answer sessions – not all work areas require an in depth review, this option allows members to gain a quick understanding of a subject area through receiving a written/verbal update from officers and having the opportunity to ask questions. The Question and Answer session may then lead to further work if deemed necessary.
 - (d) Working Groups – This allows members to scrutinise longer term projects on an ongoing basis through attending key meetings and receiving regular updates. A working sub-group will be chosen to fulfil this function.
7. Outcomes are improved through a number of methods. For example, by having formal recommendations to the Cabinet or partner organisations accepted, requesting officers to return to the committee to provide progress reports and developing working groups to provide input and challenge to medium- and long-term projects.
8. All committees have cross party membership and typically meet six times each year.

Work Programme

9. Each committee is responsible for setting their work programme. Where matters fall within the remit of more than one scrutiny committee the Chairman of the relevant committees will determine which of them will assume responsibility for the issue.
10. The work programme is based upon a number of information sources. For example, work areas suggested by members, work areas suggested by Directors and senior officers, policies expected to be introduced in the near future and relevant consultations.

11. The Policy Unit takes suggestions and provides further background and context to suggested work areas. For example, their relevance to corporate priorities, related work currently underway across the council and relevance to partnership work areas.
12. These developed suggestions are then taken back to the committee so that the final work programme can be agreed on a fuller set of information.
13. Items in the work programme are scheduled through a forward plan for each scrutiny committee. This is a working document, being updated at the end of each committee meeting. This provides sufficient flexibility to accommodate new agenda items, for example, when there is a request for a call in of a cabinet decision.

Meeting CIPFA Guidance

14. The CIPFA guidance recommends that the Audit Committee have clear access to Scrutiny Committees and that it is aware of the work of Scrutiny Committees so that it can take account of issues relevant to its areas of interest.
15. This recommendation made by CIPFA is already being met. In particular:
 - (a) Minutes and accompanying papers from each Scrutiny Committee meetings are available to all members through our public website.
 - (b) These minutes include reference to the agreed work plan for each Committee.
 - (c) Recommendations made as a result of delivering the work plan are also captured through minutes and accompanying papers from each Committee.

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Background Papers: Nil

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16 February 2010

Scrutiny Committee Remits

Committee	Responsibilities
(a) Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee (covers the remits of the Leader of the Council (excluding the responsibilities listed under Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee);	Corporate and community leadership; corporate strategies; strategic communications; finance; property
Deputy Leader of the Council;	Local strategic partnerships and District Council liaison; regional issues
Audit, Democracy & Organisation and Pension Fund Committees)	Council policy co-ordination; Council business management;
	Economic development and tourism; skills (strategic approach including adult learning); procurement; governance; performance; legal & democratic services; members' services; Human Resources; information & communications technology; change programme
	Localities-focused work; community cohesion; equalities and social inclusion; voluntary and community sector
	The elections and appointments functions of the Democracy & Organisation Committee
	The functions of the Pension Fund Committee
(b) Children's Services Scrutiny Committee (covers the remits of the Cabinet Members for Children, Young People & Families and Schools Improvement	Services for children, young people & families; preventative services; child protection; family support; educational policy; youth justice; youth service; breaking the cycle of deprivation
	Primary & secondary schools; special education; pupil services; school transport; music service

- (c) **Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee**
² (covers the remit of the Cabinet Member for Safer & Stronger Communities and specified functions of the Planning & Regulation Committee)
- Community Safety; anti-social behaviour; crime and disorder (including the fear of crime); fire & rescue; consumer protection; emergency planning; police issues; coroner's service; travellers; drugs and alcohol awareness; adult learning service; libraries; museums and heritage; the arts; archives; leisure and recreation; registration service
- Those regulatory functions of the Planning & Regulation Committee not falling within the remit of the Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee
- (d) **Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee** (covers the remits of the Leader of the Council (excluding the responsibilities listed under the Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee), Cabinet Members for Transport Implementation and Growth & Infrastructure and specified functions of the Planning & Regulation Committee)
- Strategic Planning; implementation of schemes for transport; highways; traffic and parking; road safety; public passenger transport; flooding
- Regional planning and local development framework; housing; economic development; skills; waste management; environmental management; archaeology; access to the countryside; tourism; clean and green; climate change
- The planning, highways, rights of way and commons/village greens functions of the Planning & Regulation Committee
- (e) **Adult Services Scrutiny Committee** (covers the remit of Cabinet Member for Adult Services)
- Adult social services; health issues

² This committee has the power to review and scrutinise, and make reports or recommendations, regarding the functioning of the responsible authorities (local authorities, fire and rescue authorities, police authorities, the police, primary care trusts) which comprise a Crime & Disorder Reduction Partnership/Community Safety Partnership - in accordance with the Police and Justice Act 2006 (as amended by the Crime and Disorder (Overview and Scrutiny) Regulations 2009).

(f) **Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

The Committee and its sub-committees will discharge the functions conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000 (as modified by Section 7 of the Health and Social Care Act 2001 and associated Regulations and Guidance).

To review or scrutinise within the agreed framework, health services commissioned or delivered in Oxfordshire, or jointly with any other local authority where such services are commissioned outside Oxfordshire but are delivered to the inhabitants of the County.

To receive and consider any matter referred to the Committee by a Patients Forum by virtue of powers under the NHS Reform and Health Care Professions Act 2002.

To review or scrutinise any other issues related to health and the population of Oxfordshire.