



**OXFORDSHIRE  
COUNTY COUNCIL**

# **Scrutiny Annual Report**

**2012 – 2013**

## **Foreword**

2012/13 has seen many important changes to how scrutiny will operate in the future. The Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny committee oversaw a cross-party working group to review the council's governance arrangements and to consider a range of proposals. These changes have been accepted by council and will be rolled out under the new council.

Whilst scrutiny is poised to change, it is important to reflect on the hard work carried out by the scrutiny committees in the past year. The case studies in this Annual Report provide a snapshot of the committees' work during 2012/13. It has been a varied year with committees scrutinising a wide range of activity and services across both the council and its partnership work. The case studies reflect scrutiny's role in monitoring, informing, reviewing and collaborating with others to champion high quality services for the benefit of the people of Oxfordshire.

I look forward to building on the current approach to involve members all the more in policy development and scrutiny of our services performance.

**Cllr Lorraine Lindsay-Gale**  
**Chairman (2012-13)**  
**Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee**

## Introduction

This Scrutiny Annual Report provides an overview of the work of the council's six scrutiny committees over the course of 2012/13. The Committees are:

- Adult Services Scrutiny Committee
- Children's Services Scrutiny Committee
- Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee
- Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)
- Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee
- Strategy & Partnerships Scrutiny Committee

Scrutiny committees challenge the cabinet, examine council performance, influence cabinet decision making, help develop policies, represent the community and promote joined up working. However, it does not make day to day service decisions or investigate individual complaints.

This report is structured to reflect the changes to scrutiny which are soon to be implemented. The first section describes the impact that the governance changes will have on the structure, organisation and operation of the council's scrutiny function. This is followed by a summary of the highlights of work carried out this year by each scrutiny committee.

### Looking Forward – Scrutiny in 2013/14

The Localism Act 2011 creates new freedoms for local authorities to consider for themselves the best framework for decision making in the council and for increasing member involvement.

The reduction in the number of members (following a boundary review) and the availability of fewer staff and resources to support future arrangements provided an opportunity to review the council's governance arrangements.

Consequently, Cabinet asked the Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee to oversee a cross-party working group to review the council's governance arrangements and to consider a range of proposals.

The recommendations from the working group enjoyed cross-party support and have been agreed by council. The governance arrangements will tie in more closely with the business of the council and provide an opportunity for the greater engagement of all members.

In future scrutiny will be arranged as follows:

Core Scrutiny Committees: The Overview and Scrutiny function will continue to be independent of Cabinet and include three standing committees with standing chairmen appointed by their Committee. These are the **Performance Scrutiny Committee**, **Education Scrutiny Committee** and the **Health Overview Scrutiny**

**Committee.** Committees report to the Cabinet and will meet at least four times a year.

Transport Advisory Panel: The Transport Advisory Panel will support the Cabinet member for transport with their delegated decision making. The Panel will also advise the Cabinet member on transport policy developments and ensure policies are developed with the needs of Oxfordshire's diverse communities in mind.

Cabinet Advisory Groups: These Groups will primarily examine topics selected by Cabinet which align to corporate council priorities. This will enable back bench members to be more closely involved with issues of greatest importance to the council.

The remit of these groups will be 'task and finish'. The scope of these groups will be from single one-off meetings to larger projects.

Following a Department of Health consultation in Summer 2012 new regulations for Health Overview and Scrutiny have been introduced. The Oxfordshire HOSC responded to the consultation and its preferred option that councils have the power to delegate responsibility to their HOSC has been included in the new regulations.

## **Highlights of 2012-2013:**

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### **Adult Services Scrutiny Committee**

#### ***Day Services***

Oxfordshire County Council currently operates seven day centres. These are active community hubs providing useful information, activities, services and advice to Oxfordshire residents. The Adult Services Scrutiny Committee have worked with officers and service providers around proposals for increased charges to both day services and transport to day services. These changes would bring fees in Oxfordshire into line with other authorities. The Committee considered proposals and oversaw a consultation exercise on the issue. The committee accepted the need to increase the fees but only for those who could afford it. There were some concerns that clients would find a sharp increase in fees difficult to manage. The committee recommended the phasing of fees over a two year period with an agreement to produce an annual report monitoring use and attendance. These recommendations were adopted by Cabinet in January 2013. This work secures the future of day services within the constraints of the current budget and protects the most vulnerable members of the community from any sudden changes in their routine.

#### ***Quality and Monitoring***

Oxfordshire County Council has a statutory duty to monitor and ensure quality standards in the care they provide. The committee has taken a close interest in ensuring quality and safety in commissioned services is maintained. The monitoring frameworks that have been put in place have reassured the committee, but concerns remain over the level of oversight in non-directly funded services. Discussions with senior officers at the Care Quality Commission have resulted in the decision to keep a close review of their resources available in this area.

#### ***Joint Physical Disability Commissioning Strategy***

Oxfordshire County Council is responsible for meeting the social care and support needs of people with physical disabilities. The Adult Services Scrutiny Committee has been concerned that services should be as joined up as possible with other healthcare provision in the county. The Committee and the regional Clinical Commissioning Group have worked together to propose a joint commissioning strategy, with a dedicated pooled budget arrangement that will better meet the needs of people with physical disability. This integrated approach will deliver better outcomes and help people to live as independently as possible for as long as possible. The committee were encouraged by the positive work being done in this area which has resulted in a personalised, well-managed and joined up approach to joint commissioning.

## **Councillor Jim Couchman, Chairman of the Adult Services Scrutiny Committee**

*“The Adult Services Scrutiny Committee has continued to play a crucial role in holding cabinet to account and providing cross party challenge on policy development. We have debated a range of vital themes over the past year. There have been complex challenges around quality and monitoring across adult services which has driven the activities of the committee, and ensured that smooth transitions by adults in care between various services in a timely manner remained the main aim of the committee. This commitment to care needs to be strengthened and the exercise of choice and protection of independence should be brought into focus.*

*I should like to thank all of the members (full and substitute) and staff who have contributed to the good work that the committee has achieved. Adult Services has not just the largest non-schools service budget but also provides for the needs of the County’s most vulnerable service users; it is subject to much complex statute and its transformation over the past three years has presented major challenges. It is to the credit of the Adult Services Scrutiny Committee that we have been able to conduct our business in a positive and constructive manner without too much politics intervening. I hope that the new arrangements for scrutiny continue to give substantial weight to the importance of social care particularly as new funding arrangements are developed.”*

## **Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee**

### ***Keeping Young People in Education, Employment and Training***

Oxfordshire County Council is committed to providing the best opportunities for its 115,842 school age residents. This means investing in and providing the most appropriate and effective resources to help keep children in education, employment or training. The scrutiny committee in September 2012 held a seminar entitled "Preparing Young People for Employment" which saw presentations from schools and businesses demonstrating how they work with young people. The committee identified a clear focus on STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Maths) subjects and strong partnership working with businesses as good ways to help schools prepare young people for the world of work and the skills needs of Oxfordshire employers. The committee followed up on this work in February 2013, visiting 4 schools. At these visits they explored good practice for raising attainment in STEM subjects and how strong links with businesses can be shared with schools across the county. The work done by the committee in this area will inform and shape OCC policy in relation to the Oxfordshire Skills Board which will have a long term impact upon the fortunes of young people in Oxfordshire.

### ***Early Intervention Hubs***

The Early Intervention Service offers high quality early intervention and specialist services to children, young people and families with additional and complex needs. The Children’s Services Scrutiny Committee has monitored the new hub arrangements introduced in 2011. Each hub is a ‘one-stop shop’ ensuring a joined-up process which provides high-quality early intervention and specialist services to children, young people and families. The committee conducted a review of the hubs

in September 2012 including a visit to each hub. The visits were well received by service managers and councillors, and are a clear example of scrutiny committee community engagement. The Committee praised the work of the hubs and the positive impact they made to the families they worked with. The Committee also recommended future improvements, particularly around fostering partnerships with schools, health, the police and the local community. The committee will continue to monitor the hubs, particularly focussing on more cohesive working with Children's Centres to provide a more effective early intervention service.

### **Key Stage 1 Attainment**

Key Stage 1 is an important first step in the education system which the council wishes to ensure every Oxfordshire child passes through successfully. Recent Key Stage 1 results provided an opportunity to monitor and show a commitment to raising attainment and improving the services providing support in this area. The scrutiny committee monitored the implementation of improvement actions to meet set targets. This has led to a recognisable improvement in Key Stage 1 attainment in 2012. The Committee fully recognised the marked improvement in Early Years Assessments in the preceding two years and their impact on the improved results, particularly in Oxford City. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee remains focussed on seeing improved educational attainment for all pupils across Oxfordshire and will use the lessons learned in making KS1 improvements to improve attainment more generally. Oversight of attainment will also be supported through continued updates on the Reading Campaign which was launched by the council in September 2012.

#### **Councillor Michael Waine, Chairman of the Children's Services Scrutiny Committee**

*"Events both nationally and locally have brought the activities of Children's Services into the spotlight. The Children's Services Scrutiny Committee has faced these challenges head on. The committee has been active in seeking out best practice through visits and engagement across the county. Recognising and promoting front line services has also been a large and significant area of the work we have done this year. One of the biggest challenges we have faced has been the need to improve Oxfordshire's Key Stage 1 results. The committee has fulfilled an important role in holding performance to account and the improvement of results has been encouraging."*

## **Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee**

### ***Countryside Services Visit***

The majority of Oxfordshire's residents live in a rural setting or in urban places of less than 10,000 people. Therefore, a commitment to the protection of the rural environment is vital in maintaining the standards of living of Oxfordshire's inhabitants. In April the Committee visited the Earth Trust Centre in Little Wittenham to see the Countryside Service Team in action. The Earth Trust explained to the Committee the difficulties encountered when managing public rights of way on private land. The committee were also shown the work being done to protect and encourage woodland in Oxfordshire. Following this visit the Committee discussed the importance of open spaces to residents and to Oxfordshire's economic growth. The Committee supports the work done by the groups such as the Earth Trust to map and quantify the value of open spaces in Oxfordshire, ensuring that open space is considered a core part of future OCC infrastructure.

### ***Master planning***

As part of the Oxfordshire 2030 plan the county council has committed to several master plans that will guide and encourage the development of key population centres. Through 2012 the Growth and Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee has been keen to explore the council's approach to master planning, due to its importance in shaping growth at Oxfordshire's key strategic sites. The committee supports the concept and benefits of master planning. Following presentations and discussions with planning experts, the committee stressed the importance of the implementation stage that came after any master planning work. The Committee highlighted how crucial it was that lessons were learnt from any work undertaken, and recommended these lessons should be used to create and refine a blueprint for the county's future master planning work.

### ***Energy reduction***

Oxfordshire County Council has committed to reducing Carbon Emissions. Following continued interest and scrutiny by the committee regarding energy reduction in the previous year, the Committee were keen to track progress. The committee challenged the Energy and Environment Strategy Team who provided a paper and presentation on the council's activities in this area including work underway to reduce energy consumption in schools. The committee tested assumptions made when calculating the council's new energy reduction target. Following a discussion of the positive results, the Committee praised the good work being done to reduce energy usage within Oxfordshire. In addition, a list of low energy behaviours was also agreed by the committee that will continue to reduce OCC carbon emissions. The committee is assured that the council remains best equipped to meet the challenges in meeting their energy reduction goals.



## **Councillor David Nimmo-Smith, Chairman of the Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee**

*“The Growth & Infrastructure Scrutiny Committee has continued to comment and scrutinise the work of the council on a number of significant issues. This scrutiny has seen the Committee meet and visit employees in the council and interested parties to address significant development issues in the county. The committee has promoted both long term and short term economic development for the county and the work we have done in this area will allow local communities to reap the rewards in the future as Oxfordshire continues its development as a vital hub for work, education and living. The future promises many challenges but scrutiny has ensured that economic growth is a driving goal.”*

## **Health Overview Scrutiny Committee**

### ***Health Service Reforms – Clinical Commissioning Group***

The creation of Clinical Commissioning Groups is one of the biggest changes to happen within the NHS for many years. Over the past year the HOSC has closely monitored these changes and its impact upon care within Oxfordshire. Working with the outgoing Primary Care Trust and incoming Clinical Commissioning Group for Oxfordshire, the committee has sought to understand the fundamental changes happening to the organisation of local health services. The committee has acted as the champion for patients. The committee has lobbied for better patient involvement in the new clinical commissioning arrangements through Patient Involvement Forums at practice level. The committee has also highlighted the importance of GP engagement and has been pleased to see the locality arrangements develop over the year. The CCG formally took over in April 2013 and the working relationship built up in the previous months has enabled a strong engaged beginning to this new relationship. The HOSC is keen to encourage close working between the CCG and the Health and Well-being Board which has also just taken over formal status. It will continue to closely monitor the activity of the CCG (particularly as it begins to commission services) and the Board to promote a seamless approach that brings together services better tailored to the needs of the communities they serve and explore opportunities for greater integration.

### ***Primary Care***

The remit of the HOSC ensures an overview of all healthcare services provided across the county. In 2012 the HOSC broke new ground by scrutinising primary care services. Whilst it had previously looked at dental services there had never been any review of other primary care services (general practice, pharmacy, optometry). Working with the Primary Care Trust and its successor organisations, the Local Area Team and Clinical Commissioning Group, the committee had a very constructive debate about the challenges facing primary care. Involvement of the Local Medical Council, the body which represents general practitioners, was hugely valuable to quality of the debate. The LMC raised a number of concerns about the future of general practice and the pressures that practices are currently under. The HOSC was able to challenge the commissioners about the causes of these concerns and how they are being addressed. In particular, the theme of patient choice (primarily through the Patient Choice Pilots and Patient Participation Surveys) was a recurring

theme in the work presented to the committee. Overall, the work of the committee in this area is in helping to scrutinize the transition of providers of primary care that are underway and will be the focus of the next years' work.

### **Chipping Norton Maternity Unit**

Late in 2012, at a regular HOSC liaison meeting with the Oxford University Hospitals Trust (OUHT) concerns about transfer rates and the low numbers of births taking place at the Chipping Norton maternity unit were brought to the Chairman's attention. The chairman supported the decision to suspend births at the unit whilst a formal investigation of the issues was carried out. HOSC involvement was driven by considerable local opinion about the issue and broad support for the service to remain in the community.

At its November meeting, the HOSC heard from all sides and subsequently met with senior leaders at the Trust to agree the terms of a Review. The Trust agreed to the HOSCs recommendation that independent observers should be allowed to attend interviews with staff if requested to ensure openness and avoid any concerns of intimidation.

Some early findings and progress of the review were reported to the HOSC in February 2013 where the local community and other interested parties again strongly made the case for reopening the Unit. HOSC has discussed the outcomes of the review of the unit and is encouraging the OUHT to reopen the unit as soon as it is safe to do so.

The HOSC also highlighted concerns about the potential longer term negative impact that the continued cessation of births would have on the on-going viability of the service in Chipping Norton. Members urged the Trust to build in a campaign to rebuild the reputation and popularity of the Unit before the Unit reopens.

#### **Councillor Peter Skolar, Chairman of the Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee**

*"2012/13 has seen even more developments in the world of health reform. Considerable work has been undertaken to assist in the introduction of Clinical Commissioning Groups and the transition of Public Health to the remit of the county council. The Health Scrutiny committee has been closely involved as these changes have taken shape. The committee is pleased to see these changes take effect and how the new agenda is being taken forward between partners in Oxfordshire. The main challenge in the coming year will be to ensure that the transition and implementation of these new services is carried out in the most effective way."*

## **Safer and Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee**

### **Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act (RIPA)**

RIPA provides the statutory framework for covert surveillance activities to be lawfully undertaken by a local authority. The Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee reviews the authority's use of the Act and sets the policy on an annual

basis. The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012 introduces two important amendments to RIPA. These are that authorities can only employ direct surveillance for particular offences and these surveillance authorisations require approval from a magistrate. During 2012-2013 the committee have examined the amendments and concluded that the implications for the council should be minimal, as all authorisations in recent years have met the serious crime threshold. The committee continue with their monitoring role with regard to RIPA and are satisfied that the current council Policy is in accordance with The Protection of Freedoms Act 2012.

### ***Retained Fire Service Review***

The Retained Duty System is a longstanding and effective method of crewing operational fire stations/ appliances for rural and semi-rural Fire and Rescue Services. However, the system's effectiveness and longevity is increasingly challenged by a range of societal and legislative factors. Recent innovation within the service has led to a more flexible use of all resources and the close working with retained staff in continuing to make improvements, as part of the service's Integrated Risk Management Plan. Members have been involved in supporting this work and the committee continues to monitor the development and implementation of the review. The committee visited on-call stations, met with many retained firefighters, and listened to advice from officers and investigated models from other authorities as part of this review. The impact of this process is to ensure the continued effectiveness and longevity of the service.

### ***Library Strategy and Review of Mobile Library Service***

The Safer & Stronger Communities Scrutiny Committee continues to play a key role in examining the development of the library service. The committee examined the growth of community involvement in the Library Service and Committee members became stakeholders in the review of the Mobile Library Service. Through reports from the Library service, the scrutiny committee have closely monitored the development of Community and Community Plus Libraries. In addition, the committee has received feedback from members of the public to highlight their concerns about the progression of the Library Strategy.

#### ***Councillor Lawrie Stratford, Chairman of the Safer & Stronger Scrutiny Committee***

*"The wide range of activity covered by the work of the Safer & Stronger Scrutiny Committee gives us a varied program; including fire & rescue, crime and disorder reduction, trading standards, library and museum services and registration and coroner's services. Regardless of this diversity, all these services face the challenge of balancing the reduction of financial resources with providing a high quality and highly valued service. In order to be successful we have seen services develop a range of increasingly collaborative arrangements with a range of partners. Scrutiny supports excellent customer service whilst maintaining value for money by understanding our communities' aspirations and concerns and promoting these to Officers, Cabinet and Partners."*

## **Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee**

### **Governance Review**

At its first meeting of the year the Committee accepted a request from Cabinet to explore how member engagement in council governance and in scrutiny in particular could be improved in future. A member working group formed in May 2012 met throughout the year and put forward proposals to council in April 2013.

The working group used evidence from a member survey and local authority research to develop proposals designed to provide more opportunities for backbench members to be meaningfully involved in policy development, and for scrutiny to be better focused on key issues of most importance to the council.

The proposals put forward reflect the smaller council from May 2013 both in terms of councillor and officer resources and are designed to make better use of resources available. This enables local members to bring their input and expertise to policy development and more clearly hold the Cabinet to account for delivery and improvement. The developments ultimately aim to improve the quality, relevance and performance of services and strategies for the people of Oxfordshire.

### **Partnerships**

Partnership working is a key aspect of the Committee's remit and an agenda which is becoming increasingly important for the authority. Therefore the committee dedicated time over three meetings and several reports to better understand the partnership landscape in Oxfordshire. Members challenged how partnerships are held to account and progress is measured, particularly in relation to the Local Economic Partnership (LEP).

Councillor Hudspeth was invited to account for the work done by the LEP Board as the county council's representative. He explained how members of the partnership worked together. The committee further investigated the priorities of the LEP by visiting one of its priority locations, Harwell Oxford, in January 2013. The Committee's interest in the LEP and partnership working more broadly has helped to raise the profile of the council's role in supporting and challenging partnerships to achieve tangible outcomes for Oxfordshire.

### **Corporate Plan**

Delivery on the targets set out in the annual Corporate Plan is critical to the council's success. Effective review and analysis of the performance reports ensures that these targets are being met. During 2012/13 the committee continued a commitment made by the previous chairman to regularly monitor progress against the council's corporate plan. The committee received reports in advance of Cabinet which enabled it to question and probe into the progress data. The Committee improved the information provided by suggesting ways that the data could be made more meaningful and easier to understand for members and the public alike by adding Red, Amber, Green ratings to each priority. This enabled the committee to focus its scrutiny to maximise outcomes.

**Councillor Lorraine Lindsay-Gale, Chairman of the Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee**

“This year has seen some significant work carried out by the Strategy and Partnerships Scrutiny Committee. Two main aims have been fulfilled in the work we have carried out. Firstly, we have agreed measures to improve Member engagement through the Governance Review. This has ensured a more flexible and efficient scrutiny arrangement that will better benefit the people of Oxfordshire. The second aim we have fulfilled is promoting a better understanding of partnerships. We have heard several reports that have helped to explain the important role and the several benefits partnerships afford the council. Overall, this has resulted in a strengthening of scrutiny but also leads us encouragingly towards new challenges. These challenges will require us to test performance and monitoring in the council and to increase its effectiveness, something I hope the implementation of changes to scrutiny will help councillors to do.”

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