



**OXFORDSHIRE
COUNTY COUNCIL**

Scrutiny Annual Report

2014 – 2015

Foreword

2014-15 has been a busy year for our Scrutiny Committees. It has also been a time of change for the Cabinet Advisory Groups, as two have reported on their findings.

Our Committees have been involved in improving service provision, informing policy development, and ensuring transparency in service delivery. We have held service deliverers to account and addressed issues of concern for our community.

Following the introduction of the governance arrangements and the Monitoring Officer's Governance and Constitutional reviews, our Scrutiny Committees have been responding to recommendations. It has been cemented that scrutiny committees are an effective means of reviewing educational issues, health services and performance management as well as that transparency and targeted scrutiny are essential.

The Service & Resource Planning process for 2015/16 to 2017/18 set out a number of pressures for the County Council to deal with and as we look forward the role of the Scrutiny Committees will become increasingly important to ensure service delivery is not compromised as budgets continue to reduce.

Scrutiny plays a pivotal role in delivering democracy and ensuring the Council's services are delivered to the highest standards. Faced with uncertain times as governance processes are set to change we remain committed to our scrutiny role. Challenging and scrutinising specific service areas, to ensure that the Council delivers effective services to the communities that live and work in Oxfordshire remains our priority.

Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE – Chairman of the Performance Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Mark Gray – Chairman of the Education Scrutiny Committee

Cllr Yvonne Constance OBE – Chairman of the Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Introduction

Since the last Scrutiny Annual Report, the scrutiny function has made some changes as part of the Governance and Constitutional Reviews. The committees have become more strategic in their focus and look at issues in a more cross cutting way. They have driven a more towards greater openness and transparency which manifests itself as services being more open to challenge.

The Governance Review looked at the decision-making arrangements which took effect in May 2013 and assessed their effectiveness in engaging members more fully and integrating policy and performance management more closely.

The Constitution Review assessed the full Constitution and in particular key sections such as the Council, Cabinet, Scrutiny, Contract and Financial Procedure Rules – updating, clarifying and improving the rules which underpin the Council's governance.

The reviews noted the Scrutiny Committee's must continue to work towards developing a more targeted focus, on key issues and performance. For example, using member briefings to increase specialist knowledge and carrying out reviews of specific areas of concern. Furthermore the reviews requested that Cabinet Advisory Groups ensure they are contributing effectively and visibly.

The scrutiny functions responded by striving for greater clarity on issues of concern, holding regular Chairmen's meetings to share information and holding service deliverers to account publicly. Where matters fall within the remit of more than one Scrutiny Committee the Chairmen of the relevant Scrutiny Committees determine which of them will assume responsibility for the particular issue to ensure effective scrutiny and to avoid duplication.

The Council has faced a continually changing and difficult working environment this year and the Scrutiny Committees have needed to respond. They have ensured a focus on priority issues where their scrutiny can add real value and insight. They have strived to inform decision making and challenged process and service delivery where they can make the most impact and affect outcomes for Oxfordshire residents. This is an area the Committee's will continue to work on in the coming year to ensure they are focused in the right directions.

This Scrutiny Annual Report provides an overview of the work of the Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committees in 2014/15.

This report is structured by Committee. It explores some of the areas of work each of the Committees have undertaken over the last year and highlights where influence has been greatest. The intention of the report is to provide an overview of the work of the Scrutiny Committee's and Cabinet Advisory Groups. It emphasises areas where scrutiny has had a tangible impact on decision-making, and therefore on the lives of the people of Oxfordshire. The broad range of case studies demonstrates the nature and breadth of issues that the committees have scrutinised.

The response of responsible authorities to the recent Serious Case Review into Child Sexual Exploitation in Oxfordshire is an important area for scrutiny in the coming year. All three committees will have a role in scrutinising activity to address the recommendations in the report.

Membership details for the Scrutiny Committees are provided in Annex 1.

Performance Scrutiny Committee

The Performance Scrutiny Committee has a membership of 11 county councillors and is chaired by Cllr Liz Brighthouse OBE. The county councillor membership is politically proportional to the membership of the Council. The Committee met 8 times in 2014/2015. Some of its key functions, as outlined in the Constitution, include:

- Responsible for scrutinising the performance of the council
- Providing a focused review of corporate performance, directorate performance
- Financial reporting and budget scrutiny
- Responsible for raising queries or issues of concern that may occur over decisions being taken in relation to adult social care, to provide a specific committee for addressing such queries.
- The committee that discharges the Council's scrutiny responsibilities under the Crime and Justice Act 2006, to review and scrutinise decisions made or actions taken by community safety partners.

Budget Process

The Performance Scrutiny Committee has overall responsibility for scrutinising budget proposals. The preparation of budget proposals for the period 2015/16 to 2017/18 was a refresh of the previous year's budget but provided just as much challenge for the council as in previous years due to the further savings that were required. Cuts to the grant the council receives from government and a limited ability to raise funds through increases in council tax mean that by 2018 the Council will have made savings of £292m since 2010. So far the council has worked hard to deliver efficiencies and savings of £204million. But we still have a further £88m worth of annual savings to make. As the need to make savings continues, the necessity to make significant cuts to service provision become more likely.

The Committee are committed to the principle of transparency in the budget setting process and have continued to ensure that there is effective challenge to proposals; not just through their scrutiny, but improved briefing and engagement of all members at an early stage in the process.

During their deliberation of the budget proposals the Committee identified a number of issues that it urged Cabinet to consider over the coming year prior to the next budget planning cycle:

- Reviewing the potential impact and related increase in cost of paying social care providers at a level that allowed them to pay care workers the living wage.
- The interdependency between the reshaping of early help services and the need for wider change to the shape and structure of services across the whole Children, Education and Families directorate.
- The opportunity for the library service to develop in a way that supports a broader move to digital access of our services.
- Asking directorates to review the level of challenge within performance indicators and the proposed targets, to ensure that they are realistic and manageable.

Overall the Committee sent a clear message to Cabinet that there was a need to maintain the quality of Council services when making savings, particularly where they are delivered through contracts. As a result the Committee identified the need to be directly involved in the scrutiny of contract performance, to ensure that effective public scrutiny takes place. The Committee also asked Cabinet to consider the need to maximise income generation opportunities across all directorates.

Performance Management

Having spent the first year taking a broad perspective across all service areas, the Committee have created a tighter focus to scrutiny this year. They have held more detailed discussions about specific service areas, enabling a more in depth consideration and challenge.

The Council spend £450m on commissioned services. This equates to 65% of the councils non-schools total budget and capital programme. As the need to make savings deepens it becomes more crucial to ensure that commissioned services deliver the quality services expected. The Performance Scrutiny Committee has demonstrated their commitment to this principle by focusing attention on the performance and management of contracts.

Last year, the Committee identified concerns with the effectiveness of the highways contract. Following a public investigation of the performance of the highways contract by the Committee there was an initial improvement in performance. The Committee have continued to monitor performance in this area and investigated the implementation of actions recommended following a peer review, together with officers and representatives from Skanska. The Committee identified that there was still improvement to be made in planning work to respond to problems of managing a declining road system, communications between the council and provider, and monthly performance management. The Committee urged officers to expedite their work to implement these improvements.

Safeguarding of Children

The Performance Scrutiny Committee acknowledges its vital role in scrutinising the work that the council undertakes, together with partners, to safeguard children. The members are committed to ensuring the council is effectively safeguarding the most vulnerable people within our communities.

Through the quarterly scrutiny of performance it became clear to the Committee that the council's children's social care services were under pressure. They regularly reported high numbers of children being placed on child protection plans and coming into our care, with an accompanying difficulty in carrying out reviews and visits to these children within the required timescales. The early stages of the service and resource planning process also revealed that this was causing considerable pressure on budgets. The Deputy Director for Children's Social Care, together with the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families, were invited to speak to the Committee. The Committee explored the current levels of demand and caseloads and discussed the underlying causes. The Committee were reassured by observations from OFSTED inspectors that caseloads per social worker were in line with or below the national average. They were then encouraged by early plans for a pilot in the north of the county to tackle the underlying causes of the current demand.

The pilot will focus on neglect and more joined up working practices. The Committee invited officers to return to report on the findings of the pilot. Members will further explore how to maximise the benefit from any identified good practice, both challenging and supporting the service to work out appropriate solutions

In May 2014 the Cabinet Advisory Group on the Strategic Assurance Framework for Safeguarding Children and Young People made a series of recommendations to Cabinet. A cabinet advisory group is a task and finish group set up to examine topics selected by Cabinet which align to corporate council priorities. The purpose of this group was to consider the existing strategic assurance framework for safeguarding children and young people and make any recommendations to Cabinet for changes. One of the recommendations adopted by Cabinet was for the Performance Scrutiny Committee to review how they monitor and performance manage the key safeguarding and child protection work of the Council and its key partners.

Consequently, the Committee have initiated closer working with the Oxfordshire Children's Safeguarding Board (OCSB) and invited Maggie Blyth, the independent chair of the board to present her annual report. The Committee discussed the work of the Kingfisher Team in safeguarding those children at risk of child sexual exploitation. It was agreed that Maggie Blyth would return to the Committee later in the year to present the findings of an independent review of the team later in the year; giving the Committee to consider implications for the council. The Committee explored in some detail the safeguarding risk presented by children who go missing regularly. They were particularly concerned with how reporting in this area can be improved across partners to better understand how missing children can be better supported and protected. It was agreed that further work would be carried out between the board and the council to propose effective reporting around missing children, to be discussed in March 2015.

Adult Social Care

As well as recognising the vital role in scrutinising the work that the council undertakes with children, the Performance Scrutiny Committee also acknowledges an equivalent responsibility to scrutinise adult social care activity.

Through the quarterly scrutiny of performance the Committee members identified that there was a continuing trend of poor performance around the Council's reablement services provided by Oxford Health and commissioned by the Council. Reablement offers short term support designed to help people regain independence after ill health. The contract is managed through the Joint Commissioning Team so the deputy director attended the Committee to provide further evidence and discuss the Committee's concerns. The Committee examined the contract arrangements and performance in detail and revealed underlying causes around workforce availability and community based referrals. Work is taking place within the service, the results of which will be further scrutinised by the Committee to ensure that it an effective response to the underlying problems is implemented.

The Committee also explored the wider issue of adult safeguarding, seeking to understand the extent of the Council's responsibility. The Committee addressed issues around the referral process, definitions of abuse and appropriate monitoring and performance tools. The key outcome was an agreement for the Committee to

examine the annual report of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Board, later this year and then in all subsequent years. The Committee wish to use their examination as an opportunity to ask searching questions, explore information in more depth and ensure agreed actions are implemented.

Call In

The call-in procedure allows the Performance Scrutiny Committee to compel the Cabinet to reconsider a decision made by its members, but not yet implemented. There must be compelling grounds for review. The Committee has considered two call in requests this year.

Middleton Stoney Road, Bicester: Proposed Road Humps and Puffin Crossing

The Cabinet Member for the Environment had made a decision to create road traffic calming measures on the Middleton Stoney Road, in line with a previous planning application to Cherwell District Council. The Committee explored the grounds for the call in and agreed that there was sufficient doubt about the process and nature of the public consultation carried out prior to the decision being made to mean that it was not 'proper' consultation. The Committee referred the decision back to Cabinet on the grounds that there was insufficient consultation with local county councillors.

Proposed Pelican Crossings - A415 Marcham Road and Ock Street, Abingdon

The Cabinet Member for the Environment made a similar decision to provide and move pelican crossings in Abingdon, again in line with a previous planning application. The Committee considered it was the responsibility of the council to carry out an assessment of the impact of the proposals on the wider traffic network. They also challenged officers on the basis that although guidance had been referred to it was not explicitly guidance that related to the sighting of pedestrian crossings. The Committee agreed to refer the decision back to Cabinet on the grounds that neither the officer's report nor the Cabinet Member's decision appeared to be based on the Department of Transport Guidance into the assessment of pedestrian crossing sites; and that the Cabinet Member did not take due account of the impact of the changes on the wider local traffic network.

Forward Planning

The council continues to face challenging and changing times. There is likely to be a further squeeze on funding following the general election. In response, the organisation is considering a new shape and structure as it modernises. The Committee will look to identify issues that are of most significance to the council as a basis for the forward plan of work.

The Performance Scrutiny Committee is committed to strengthening its role in providing robust challenge to the performance of the council. Over the next year the Committee will continue to conduct public scrutiny of the performance of commissioned services and focus on holding detailed discussions about specific service areas, enabling a more in depth consideration and challenge. The Committee also seeks to maximise the effect of its role in scrutinising the way in which the most vulnerable members of society are safeguarded.

Education Scrutiny Committee

The Education Scrutiny Committee has a membership of 11 county councillors, 4 co-opted members and is chaired by Cllr Mark Gray. The county councillor membership is politically proportional to the membership of the Council. The Committee met 4 times in 2014/2015.

In 2014/2015 there was a standing working group chaired by Cllr John Howson, focusing on educational attainment. The group met 3 times and it concluded its work in January 2015, when a report of its key findings was presented to and endorsed by the Committee.

The Education Scrutiny Committee provides a county wide view of the provision of all the schools in Oxfordshire. As stated in the Terms of Reference of the Committee, the key functions of the Committee include:

- To assist the Council in its role of championing good educational outcomes for Oxfordshire's children and young people;
- To provide a challenge to schools and academies and to hold them to account for their academic performance;
- To promote joined up working across organisations in the education sector within Oxfordshire;
- To review the bigger picture affecting academic achievement in the county so as to facilitate the achievement of good outcomes;
- To represent the community of Oxfordshire in the development of academic achievement across the county, including responding to formal consultations and participating in inter-agency discussions;
- To contribute to the development of educational policy in the county.

Educational Attainment of Vulnerable Groups

Educational performance above the national average at Key Stage 2, and in line with the national average at Key Stage 4. However there are specific vulnerable groups where attainment is noticeably below that of the same cohort nationally. The Committee identified the need to focus on improving outcomes for low attainers and disadvantaged groups.

The Committee uncovered causes for the underperformance of vulnerable groups and challenged officers as regards the support measures in place to narrow the gap in attainment. The Committee highlighted the importance of establishing links to the Oxfordshire Teaching School Alliance and the Schools Forum, and expressed a strong commitment to the principle that raising high aspiration for students is everyone's responsibility.

Looking specifically at the performance of white working class boys, members brought in their own expertise and local knowledge to propose actions for tackling underperformance, and provided concrete examples of best practice from the schools in their areas. Members stressed the importance of role models and mentoring, parental involvement, motivation, and working with voluntary organisations.

As regards looked after children, the Committee raised concern over the high rates of persistent absence among this group, and presented a challenge to officers on the

actions needed to further improve the attainment of the 355 looked after children in Oxfordshire. The Committee highlighted the need to raise the profile of the Virtual School and increase understanding of what it means to be a Corporate Parent among school staff. The chairman committed to visiting the Virtual School team, and sent a message that the challenge for the council was around those schools not undertaking their corporate parenting role.

The educational attainment working group carried out further work into understanding the reasons for low attainment and making sure the right provisions are in place for raising attainment. In addition to reviewing the outcomes at different Key Stages, the working group also looked at the monitoring tools used by officers in their understanding of how successful schools are at achieving their educational aims and how schools can be supported to improve outcomes in the current climate where local authorities have few remaining powers.

The work of the group revealed that there are wide disparities between the best and worst schools in the county irrespective of whether they are council maintained schools, voluntary aided or controlled schools or an academy of any description. The group noted that major concern remains over the lack of progress towards the closing of the gap between different groups despite the provision of Pupil and Service Children Premiums.

At the recommendation of the working group a School Improvement Framework briefing for all councillors was organised in June 2014.

Pupil Premium

The pupil premium is additional funding given to publicly funded schools in England to raise the attainment of disadvantaged pupils and close the gap between them and their peers. Schools use pupil premium differently, and the Committee has sought to understand and scrutinise how pupil premium is being used in schools in disadvantaged areas.

Two schools were invited to give evidence about their use of pupil premium. East Oxford Primary School and St Francis Church of England Primary School presented to the Committee their work using the pupil premium and discussed some of the challenges the schools face. The Committee commended the excellent work of the two schools and emphasised the importance of sharing examples of good practice. The Committee will continue to monitor the use pupil premium and attainment of vulnerable groups across schools in Oxfordshire.

Strengthening the Links with the Schools Forum

As part of its role in reviewing governance agreements and resource allocation, the Committee invited the Schools Forum to address the Committee.

Oxfordshire Schools Forum is made up of representatives of schools and academies in the County, and acts as a consultative body on some issues and a decision making body on others. The forum is responsible for decisions on:

- How much funding may be centrally retained within the Dedicated Schools Grant

- Any proposed carry forward of deficits on central spend from one year to the next
- Proposals to de-delegate funding from maintained primary and secondary schools
- Changes to the scheme of financial management

Members heard from Carole Thomson, chair of the Schools Forum, about the role and work of the organisation. The Committee explored how the relationship between the council and the Schools Forum can be strengthened and urged officers to consider developing a compact on collaboration across wider matters other than finance. It was agreed that further work will be undertaken with the Chair of the Schools Forum, the Cabinet Member and the Chairman of this Committee around the introduction of a compact. Members identified that one way of strengthening ties with the Schools Forum is for members of the Committee to attend the meetings of the Schools Forum to better understand their working. The conversation with the chair of the Schools Forum triggered further interest in school funding and this was considered at subsequent meetings of the Committee.

Use of Schools Revenue Balances

The Committee was keen to understand the current levels of reserves held by council maintained schools and academies in Oxfordshire. In particular, the committee raised concerns over schools keeping large reserves and presented a challenge to officers on the steps taken to claw back money when unreasonable amounts have been kept by schools. The Committee firmly championed the principle of 'today's funding for today's children' and urged schools to make sure money is spent to ensure that every child is able to make educational progress.

Members also raised concern over the position with regard to academy balances, and asked officers to seek a meeting between the Committee and the Commissioner for Schools and to contact the commissioner with a view to getting some assurance on academy balances.

The Committee sent a clear message that the money in reserves should be spent for the education of today's children and asked Cabinet to support a robust approach to the discussion with school with a view to claw back surplus balances.

As a result of the Committee's request to challenge schools with surplus balances, a report was presented to the Committee on the maintained schools identified as having consistently retained surplus revenue balances, and on the work undertaken to challenge these schools about the plans for use of these balances. The Committee were given assurance that the schools identified in the report will be clearly advised that large balances retained over a period of years was not acceptable. It was emphasised that the majority of schools identified in the report had sound reasons for those balances such as being a very small school where changes in numbers of pupils can have a devastating effect on budgets. The Committee identified that it was necessary to take a school by school approach and officers confirmed that they were meeting with a small number of schools where there was particular concern to send a clear message that the County Council is taking this issue seriously.

The work challenging schools on use of balances is expected to be completed by spring 2015.

Universal Free School Meals

The Children and Families Act placed a duty on state-funded schools in England to provide free school meal for all Reception, Year 1 and Year 2 children with effect from September 2014. The Committee received a progress report on the introduction of the new arrangements in July 2014 and subsequently asked for a report on the associated implementation costs of the new arrangements to schools and the council.

The Committee raised concerns that, given the automatic entitlement to free school meals granted by the new arrangements, some parents might choose not to declare their entitlement under the original criteria. This would have a direct impact on the allocation of pupil premium funding in schools. Members discussed how parents can be made aware of the importance of continuing to register for free school meals and provided examples of good practice from local schools. The Committee asked officers to further consider how parents can be encouraged to fill in their claims and how the pupil premium information could be obtained in other ways.

Forward Planning

The Committee will continue to look at the attainment of vulnerable groups, focusing specifically on children with special educational needs and children on the edge of care. Members have invited the Regional Ofsted Inspector to address the Committee regarding the role of Oxfordshire County Council and local authorities generally in education. The Committee will continue to use its expertise to make recommendations and help disseminate information and best practice. The Committee remains committed to providing challenge and scrutiny to ensure that the council delivers on its role as champion of all children in Oxfordshire.

Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee

The Oxfordshire Joint Health Overview & Scrutiny Committee (HOSC) is a joint Committee and has a membership of 7 county councillors, five district councillors, three co-opted members and is chaired by Cllr Yvonne Constance OBE. The Committee met five times in 2014/15. Some of the prime functions of the Committee include:

- Reviewing and scrutinising any matter relating to the planning, provision and operation of health services in Oxfordshire.
- Reviewing and scrutinising services commissioned and provided by relevant NHS bodies and relevant health service providers.

The Committee elected a new Chairman, Cllr Yvonne Constance OBE, in September who took over from Cllr Stratford who joined the Cabinet. The constitution was updated to reflect new local authority regulations for health scrutiny. The Committee have looked at a variety of health related issues and services to ensure the best health care provision for the residents of Oxfordshire. The Committee have ensured Healthwatch Oxfordshire, the independent organisation for patient experiences of

health and social care in Oxfordshire, is a permanent feature on their agenda. During the past year there have been five significant issues covered by the Committee.

South Central Ambulance Service

The performance of the South Central Ambulance Service has been and continues to be a concern for the Committee. Demand for services has risen in Oxfordshire which has put significant pressure on performance delivery. While Oxford, Cherwell and Oxford City districts perform well the increase in demand has shown a reduction in performance in South Oxfordshire, West Oxfordshire and the Vale of the White Horse. Delays in rural areas are the biggest challenge for the ambulance service. A point highlighted following some serious incidents in these areas which were brought to the attention of members. Additionally the service has seen a change in the pattern of 111 activity which had increased demand and put pressure on the workforce.

These strains on the service combined with concerns about ambulance response to specific incidents led the Committee to call South Central Ambulance Service to account three times in 2014/15. The ambulance service were invited by the Committee to present in detail the difficulties they were facing and provide answers to delays in their response to specific incidents.

While the South Central Ambulance Service performs well in comparison to some areas of England the Committee were keen to understand how national standards were filtering down to the local level. It was essential for the members to understand how ambulance delays were impacting in other areas and what continuity planning the service had in place. The connection with other partners was a key feature to discussions with an emphasis on more joined up working to deal with challenges. Financial cuts to the service are well rehearsed at national levels, but that does not mean Oxfordshire's residents should have a compromised service.

The Committee have challenged the service and their commissioners and emphasised the importance to them of providing a consistent service across Oxfordshire. The Committee continue to monitor service delivery and will delve into the response to specific incidents where they are unsatisfied with the response to ensure that processes are improved and policies reviewed in order to ensure lessons are learnt.

Delayed Transfers of Care

Delayed Transfers of Care continues to be an area of poor performance by Oxfordshire. The number of days of delay for people waiting for social care and further health services is over targets. While efforts to address social care capacity show promise and much progress has been made, all the relevant agencies have acknowledged that there is more to be done in this area.

As a well-publicised and often criticised area this has been on the Committee's radar for some time so it is well placed to take a system wide view of the problem. The Committee pushed for a wide reaching discussion with the main health partners to understand why delayed transfers of care continues to be a problem and how that affects performance in other social care areas. The Committee were given a detailed presentation which highlighted the problems of an increasing ageing population,

changes in demand for services and resource capacity. While health care professionals have been coming together to develop a whole systems plan for addressing unacceptable levels of discharge delays, improvements have been slow.

To ensure they were not looking at delayed transfers of care in isolation the Committee were careful to link in wider social care issues including performance of the reablement service and the utilisation of community hospitals. They probed on ways services could be improved and explored what other issues were at play, including resources, staff retention and housing adaptations. During discussions the Committee were able to flush out some further concerns, including how best to deal with the costs of patient delays.

The Committee emphasised the need for effective whole systems collaboration and that they will be watching closely developments within the Better Care Fund as this should be a means to deliver better outcomes and greater efficiencies through a more integrated service across health and social care.

Having such a wide reaching discussion meant the Committee decided there were some other important issues they needed to explore. Most fittingly outcomes based commissioning and how that could contribute to future service delivery.

Community Hospitals

The Committee have taken an interest in community hospitals this year, as concerns were brought to light about adequate provision. These hospitals provide sub-acute and rehabilitation care, as well as palliative care for people who are not able / do not wish to die at home. Oxfordshire has eight sites with specialist services at some, including stroke rehabilitation and fragility fracture. Oxford Health, NHS Trust Foundation, who provide the service, explained to the Committee the improvements to models of care that had been made over the last two years, including discharge planning.

Concerns about bed numbers, staffing and future provision were addressed. Despite a reduction in actual open beds the Committee understood that the overall service had become more productive with activity remaining high and no detrimental impact on patient safety, quality or satisfaction rates. It was clear that challenges for sustainable and high quality delivery of community hospitals focused around the increased acuity and dependency of the patient population, recruitment of nursing and medical staffing and the state of the community hospital estates.

Recruitment of high calibre nursing staff is not a unique problem to Oxfordshire. It is a national challenge affecting all areas of social and medical care. Members were concerned at the scale of the problem that seemed to be developing. They queried what incentives could be made for nursing staff and what efforts were being made to attract nurses to consider community nursing.

The Committee satisfied themselves that provision in community hospitals was currently meeting the needs of residents. However they acknowledged that a careful juggling act will be required to ensure a balance of resources against need, especially taking into account future growth. The Committee stressed how the

community hospitals were seen as a valuable community resource and were pleased that actions were in place to mitigate challenges.

Primary Care Services

It quickly came to the attention of the Committee this year that they needed to look into the provision of primary care services within Oxfordshire. National concerns about the sustainability of GP services were at the forefront of their minds. With the Departments of Health and NHS England describing their vision of 'Transforming Primary Care' the members wanted to get to the root of the national strategic priorities for improving general practice and what they would mean at a local level.

With Health and Social Care services facing a number of challenges including demographic changes, changes in public expenditure regarding access, workforce pressures and economic and financial challenges, this was a topic of great importance. Oxfordshire's significant growth is set to put further pressure on primary care resources and the members were keen to understand the local challenges and what needed to be done to address need.

Excellent turn out at the Committee meeting considering this item proved to the Committee the importance being placed by the care partners. With a good balance of partners invited the Committee were able to generate an in-depth analysis of the issues surrounding primary care services and to hear what it is like at the 'coalface'.

Collaborative working within Oxfordshire has been generating discussion on the formation of primary care federations. Representatives of two of these federations addressed the committee to explain what benefits they offer to member practices and how services can be improved.

The Committee welcomed understanding better the challenges facing general practice and how the emerging vision and strategy to address these challenges would sustain and improve the quality of primary care.

The strain on resources combined with growth plans in Oxfordshire highlighted to the Committee that there is a risk of a shortfall in medical services as the population of Oxfordshire grows and so they undertook to promote this gap in the current planning system.

While noting the concerns are wider than Oxfordshire the Committee undertook to keep abreast of developments in primary care, both nationally and locally and to continue to actively engage with partners to ensure a good primary care service is maintained within Oxfordshire.

Understanding Substantive Change in Services

In order to have real impact the Committee wanted to ensure that all health providers in Oxfordshire can be held to account regarding service changes. In light of this the Committee agreed a "toolkit", in consultation with health providers to cement a joint understanding of substantive changes in services and when the Committee need to be consulted on such changes. Improving this understanding means the Committee now has an enhanced capability to scrutinise service changes by health partners and

ensure that changes to services are not made without proper consideration of the effect on service users.

Forward Planning

The Committee is keen to make service delivery and patient experience central to its work. In addition to reviewing and scrutinising planned changes in the provision of healthcare in Oxfordshire, the Committee will be looking carefully at the impact on patients. The Committee will continue to scrutinise performance and quality of service issues as they arise and hold health partners to account where services are unacceptable. Improving the quality of care and ensuring value for money for Oxfordshire residents remains at the forefront of the Committee's work. The planned usage of the Better Care Fund in Oxfordshire, will be a key part of the Committee's work in the coming year.

Cabinet Advisory Groups (CAG)

There is currently one Cabinet Advisory Groups in operation - Children's Early Intervention Services. Two further Cabinet Advisory Groups - Children and Young People's Safeguarding Assurance & Minerals and Waste finalised their work during 2014. The Income Generation Cabinet Advisory Group remained dormant.

Early Intervention CAG (*active*)

The role of the Children's Early Intervention Cabinet Advisory Group is to explore the issues related to the future provision of early intervention services for children in Oxfordshire and make recommendations with particular regard to cost-saving. The key tasks and responsibilities of the group are:

- To consider the emerging national evidence and policy relating to children's centres and early intervention services.
- To undertake visits to children's centres and early intervention hubs as necessary to help inform thinking.
- To conduct research, community and other consultation in the analysis of policy and possible options.
- To liaise with other organisations operating within Oxfordshire, whether national, regional or local.
- To consider relevant benchmarking with other authorities.
- To consider any petitions, received by the Council which may be of relevance to the topic area under consideration.
- To submit findings and recommendations to the Cabinet.

The Cabinet Advisory Group met eight times in 2014/15. Work to date has focused on a needs analysis based on deprivation, the district level current provision and the potential impact of differing funding mechanisms. The group also made a visit to Gloucestershire in December to explore Gloucestershire County Council's approach to the same issues. The CAG will report to Cabinet in Summer 2015.

Children and Young People's Safeguarding Assurance (*finalised*)

The Children and Young People's Safeguarding Assurance Arrangements Cabinet Advisory Group was set up to consider the existing strategic assurance framework

for safeguarding children and young people. It was chaired by Cllr Melinda Tilley as the Cabinet Member for Children, Education and Families.

The group reported to Cabinet on 13 May 2014, when all 14 recommendations were accepted. These are now being implemented with progress against the action plan being monitored.

The group last met in July 2014 to review the action plan for taking the recommendations forward. This was the last meeting.

Recommendations of the Cabinet Advisory Group which have been implemented include:

- Bi-annual safeguarding briefings for councillors on the work of the Oxfordshire Safeguarding Children Board (OSCB) and associated issues. The first of these took place on 21 January 2015 and the next is scheduled for 17 June 2015.
- The annual report of the OSCB has been shared widely throughout the organisation. The report was emailed directly to all councillors, and has been seen at CCMT, the Corporate Parenting Panel, Cabinet and full Council.
- Formal protocols are now in place for the joint working between the OSCB and the Children's Trust, and between the OSCB and the Health and Wellbeing Board.
- The Performance Scrutiny Committee has reviewed the current safeguarding key performance indicators.
- The Education Scrutiny Committee has received the Virtual School of Looked After Children Annual Report.
- Locality-specific information on children's safeguarding and corporate parenting has been provided to member locality meetings. This will be an annual item.
- The Director for Children's Services reported to Cabinet on action taken in response to the serious case review for Child H on 25 November 2014. Bi-annual reports to Cabinet will cover all serious case reviews in the preceding 6 month period.
- The role of the Corporate Parenting Panel has been reviewed.

Other on-going work includes:

- A review is being undertaken to understand and rationalise the working relationships between external partners, including the OSCB and Community Safety.
- The Director for Children's Services is considering further improvements with regards to communication and briefings for members on all aspects of children's safeguarding.

Minerals and Waste (finalised)

The Minerals and Waste Cabinet Advisory Group was formed in July 2013 to provide member engagement in the process of developing the new Minerals and Waste Local Plan. Recognising the legitimate interest of a range of members in this issue it was not subject to the usual rules around maximum size and political balance.

The group has held nine meetings, concerned in particular with strategic planning issues and the need to refresh the Oxfordshire Local Aggregate Assessment, including consultation with stakeholders, and discharge of the Duty to Co-operate. The Group reported to Cabinet, including in its deliberations on the Minerals and Waste Local Plan (Part 1 - Core Strategy) on 25 November 2014, to which a number of members contributed.

The group has had no further meetings as the Core Strategy is awaiting a Full Council decision following the Cabinet meeting, prior to submission to the Planning Inspectorate. Further meetings may be required as the Council moves towards adoption of a full Plan, however as this will follow the Inspector's report they are likely to fall in 2016.

Income Generation (dormant)

The Income Generation Cabinet Advisory Group was formed in July 2013 to explore options for increasing income generation as part of meeting the required savings target in the developing MTFP. The group focussed on reviewing the scope for changes to charging and trading, and oversaw redrafting of the corporate charging policy, which was approved by Cabinet at its meeting on 17 December 2013.

With input from other councillors, officers and members of the public, the group identified a number of ideas for income generation and channels of enquiry to pursue, with recommendations made to Cabinet on 28 January 2014. A number of avenues of work continue to be taken forward by officers, and Cabinet have signalled the intention to reinstate the Cabinet Advisory Group in 2015/16.

Membership details for the active Cabinet Advisory Group is provided in Annex 2.

Conclusion

The Council has faced a number of challenges this year, not least of which was passing a difficult budget in the face increasing need over diminishing resources. Furthermore it was subject to an Ofsted inspection on children's services and serious case review, adding additional pressure.

Scrutiny Committees have played an important role in identifying areas of concern, honing in on them and working to achieve satisfactory outcomes for communities and service users. The Committees have settled into their roles, following finalisation of the constitutional and governance reviews. The Committees strive for transparency and through regular Chairman meetings have improved communications channels and avoided duplication in working.

The broad remits of the Committees continue to be a challenge for them to ensure proper attention is given to pressing issues. It is necessary for the Committee's to use their powers to challenge performance and analyse the work of the council and those who provide services to have a positive impact on outcomes. Scrutiny remains an essential part of the Council's working and will become ever more important as resources are squeezed and the operating model for the council changes.

Annex 1 Scrutiny Committee Membership 2014/15

Performance

Councillor Liz Brighthouse OBE (Chairman)
Councillor Neil Fawcett (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Lynda Atkins
Councillor John Christie
Councillor Sam Coates
Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Mark Gray
Councillor Steve Harrod
Councillor Simon Hoare
Councillor Charles Mathew

Education Scrutiny

Councillor Mark Gray (Chairman)
Councillor Michael Waine (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Kevin Bulmer
Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE
Councillor Steve Curran
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Pete Handley
Councillor Steve Harrod
Councillor John Howson
Councillor Sandy Lovatt
Councillor Gill Sanders

Co-Optee

Mrs Sue Matthew

Health Overview and Scrutiny Committee (HOSC)

Councillor Yvonne Constance OBE (Chairman)
District Councillor Susanna Pressel (Deputy Chairman)
Councillor Kevin Bulmer
Councillor Surinder Dhesi
Councillor Tim Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Laura Price
Councillor Alison Rooke
Councillor Les Sibley
District Councillor Martin Barrett
District Councillor Dr Christopher Hood
District Councillor Rose Stratford
District Councillor Alison Thomson

Co-Optees

Dr Keith Ruddle

Mrs Anne Wilkinson

Moria Logie

Annex 2 Cabinet Advisory Group Membership

Early Intervention

Councillor Melinda Tilley (Chairman)
Councillor Mark Gray (Vice-Chairman)
Councillor Janet Godden
Councillor Hilary Hibbert-Biles
Councillor Gill Sanders