

PERFORMANCE & CORPORATE SERVICES OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

MINUTES of the meeting held on Friday, 8 October 2021 commencing at 10.00 am and finishing at 11.45 am

Present:

Voting Members:

Councillor Brad Baines
Councillor Ian Corkin
Councillor Donna Ford
Councillor Andrew Gant
Councillor Damian Haywood
Councillor Ian Middleton
Councillor Michael O'Connor
Councillor Eddie Reeves
Councillor David Rouane

Other Members in Attendance:

Councillor Liz Leffman (attended remotely)
Councillor Glynis Phillips (attended remotely)

Officers:

Anita Bradley (Director of Law and Governance), Claire Taylor (Corporate Director of Customers and Organisational Development), Jodie Townsend (Law and Governance), Kathy Wilcox (Head of Financial Strategy) (attended remotely) and Khalid Ahmed (Law and Governance).

The Scrutiny Committee considered the matters, reports and recommendations contained or referred to in the agenda for the meeting and agreed as set out below. Copies of the agenda and reports are attached to the signed Minutes.

1/21 ELECTION OF CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF THE 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

(Agenda No. 1)

That Councillor Eddie Reeves be appointed Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

Councillor Reeves took the Chair

2/21 ELECTION OF VICE-CHAIR FOR THE REMAINDER OF 2021/22 MUNICIPAL YEAR

(Agenda No. 2)

That Councillor Michael O'Connor be appointed Vice-Chair for the 2021/22 Municipal Year.

3/21 DEVELOPING THE OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY FUNCTION

(Agenda No. 6)

Consideration was given to a report of the Director of Law and Governance which set out proposals and initial ideas to develop the Overview and Scrutiny function for Oxfordshire County Council.

The Committee was informed that the new approach to scrutiny would only develop and add value if it was supported by officers and by Members of both Scrutiny and Cabinet.

Reference was made to an Overview and Scrutiny Development Plan which would set out how the Council, its Members, officers and partners would improve and develop the function.

An annual report would be produced which would detail the activity of the Committee, how the Committee's work has added value, to gauge where the function was. There would be an assessment or health check which would assess how the Committee was performing and developing.

The core scrutiny principles which Overview and Scrutiny would operate under would be:

- Be Member-led
- Take a consensual approach
- Be evidence-based
- Dive deeper
- Provide constructive challenge
- Seek to amplify the voice and concerns of the public.

Members were informed that statutory guidance recommended a Cabinet / Scrutiny Protocol be developed to strengthen scrutiny procedures, to develop and facilitate the working relationship between the executive and scrutiny, to build good relationships and clear lines of communication, all of which are important to bring effective scrutiny and add value to the work of the Council.

A general discussion took place on the role of scrutiny with the following points made;

- A consensus approach was important, and scrutiny should be evidence based, with reports containing relevant information published with the agenda
- There should be a development of the criteria used to select review topics to ensure a review was worthwhile and beneficial for Members to scrutinise
- Communication of the work of Scrutiny was important and would raise the profile of the work of Scrutiny
- Best Practise and looking at the work of other scrutiny committees and how they functioned was important
- Pre-briefings were important
- Scrutiny should receive relevant Cabinet reports well in advance of decisions being made
- Where possible there should be dedicated officers for scrutiny

- Scrutiny should be a “critical friend” to the Executive to enable the process to be effective
- There would be regular meetings between the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the three Overview and Scrutiny Committees
- Regular monitoring of implementations of recommendations made by Overview and Scrutiny

RESOLVED – That the contents of the report, together with the discussion which took place be noted and officers be asked to develop the Overview and Scrutiny function.

4/21 WORK PROGRAMME 2021/2022

(Agenda No. 7)

Consideration was given to a report which provided details of a limited engagement exercise which contained the views of Members and senior officers on possible items for this Committee’s work programme.

Members were informed that the following key principles of effective scrutiny should be considered when determining the Committee’s work programme:

- Be selective – There was a need to prioritise so that high priority issues were scrutinised given the limited number of scheduled meetings and time available. Members should consider what could realistically and properly be reviewed at each meeting, taking into account the time needed to scrutinise each item and what the session was intended to achieve.
- Add value with scrutiny – Items should have the potential to ‘add value’ to the work of the Council and its partners. If it was not clear what the intended outcomes or impact of a review would be then Members should consider if there were issues of a higher priority that could be scrutinised instead. It was recommended that Members limit the number of items they wished to consider at a meeting to 2 or 3 to maximise the time and attention they can give the topic and maximise the potential for adding value.
- Be flexible – Members were reminded that there needed to be a degree of flexibility in their work programme to respond to unforeseen issues/items for consideration/comment during the year and accommodate any developmental or additional work that falls within the remit of this Committee.

A discussion took place on the work programme suggestions which had been received. Reference was made to the limited time available as the Committee only had four meetings and it was noted that Task and Finish Groups could work on scrutiny reviews and submit reports to the Committee with their findings.

The importance of Scrutiny having the opportunity to comment on Cabinet reports was discussed and Members noted that there was an opportunity for any Member of the Council to attend Cabinet and ask a relevant Cabinet Member a question.

The following items within the scope of this Committee were asked to be placed in the work programme:

- **Budget Scrutiny Process** – Opportunity to develop a best practice approach to budget scrutiny at OCC for the benefit of future years – Members were informed that the Director of Finance would be submitting a report to this Committee in January on Budget proposals to enable Overview and Scrutiny comments to be considered at Cabinet.
- **Capital Programme** – was it delivering for Oxfordshire? This would also be reported to this Committee in January to enable Overview and Scrutiny comments to be considered at Cabinet.
- **Transformation Programmes** – an opportunity to review the Council's ongoing service redesigns and plans for the future.
- **Democratic Processes** – Particular mention was made of the Forward Plan and the sequencing of meetings of Forward Plan items to ensure pre-scrutiny took place
- **Council Plan** – an assessment of the Council's strategic aims and objectives.
- **Council approach to public engagement and consultation** - The Corporate Director of Customers and Organisational Development reported that to enable the report to be considered by this Committee, this report would now be moved back to Cabinet in the Spring of 2022. It was agreed that this Committee would consider this at its next meeting in December.
- **Performance Management and Business Planning** – The Committee asked to look at key performance management targets. The Corporate Director of Customers and Organisational Development reported that to enable this Committee to have an opportunity to comment on this an informal briefing meeting could take place which could formulate comments to be reported to Cabinet. It was agreed that this would be taken forward.

The Director of Law & Governance and Monitoring Officer raised two potential items: Outcome of Fire Service inspection and the Annual Community Safety Report and it was agreed that these should be forwarded to Place Overview and Scrutiny Committee as the items did not fall within the scope of this Committee.

RESOLVED – That the recommendations in the report be noted and approval be given to the work programme items outlined above.

..... in the Chair

Date of signing 200