



DISTRICT COUNCIL
NORTH OXFORDSHIRE

**Overview and Scrutiny
Annual Report
2015/16**

April 2016

Foreword

This annual report for overview and scrutiny at Cherwell District Council outlines the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee in 2015/16.

The Committee has continued to build on the work that has been done over the last few years. Whilst a number of new members have joined the Committee, bringing enthusiasm and fresh ideas, the turnover of committee membership and has been kept to a minimum in order to develop an experienced group of councillors who are building up a strong skill base and understanding of the principles of good scrutiny and at the same time a knowledge of scrutiny case history.

One of the highlights of this year's work for me was a trip to Westminster to speak to the Chair and Clerk of the Communities and Local Government Select Committee, Clive Betts MP and Mark Etherton, to find out about the similarities in the way central and local Government work when it comes to scrutiny. This gave us an opportunity to not only ask questions of the MPs, but also witness scrutiny in action as we were able to sit in on an evidence session relating to the housing association sector and the Right to Buy inquiry. The experience was extremely educational, and gave all who attended a few pointers on how to approach reviews in the future.

I believe that overview and scrutiny continues to make a valuable contribution to the continuing success of this Council.

Councillor David Hughes
Chairman,
Overview and Scrutiny Committee
2015/16

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

Membership

Councillor David Hughes (Ch)
Councillor Claire Bell
Councillor Chris Heath
Councillor Alastair Milne Home
Councillor Neil Prestidge
Councillor Lawrie Stratford

Councillor Lynn Pratt (V-Ch)
Councillor Timothy Hallchurch MBE
Councillor Matt Johnstone
Councillor James Porter
Councillor Sandra Rhodes
Councillor Bryn Williams

Substitutes

Councillor Richard Mould
Councillor Rose Stratford
Councillor Sean Woodcock

Guests in attendance

Lead members:

Councillor Tony Ilott – Lead Member for Public Protection
Councillor Debbie Pickford – Lead Member for Housing
Councillor George Reynolds – Deputy Leader of the Council.
Councillor Barry Wood – Leader of the Council.

Other members:

Councillor Sean Woodcock

Officers:

Adrian Colwell – Head of Strategic Planning and the Economy
Balvinder Heran, Joint Head of ICT Business Services
Kevin Larner – Countryside and Communities Manager
Paul Nicol - Project Manager – New Business & Systems Implementation
Marianne North – Housing Needs Manager
Gary Owens – Strategic Housing Officer
Jo Pitman – Head of Transformation
Ed Potter – Head of Environmental Services
Nicola Riley – Shared Interim Community Partnerships and Recreation Manager
Chris Stratford – Head of Regeneration and Housing
Louise Tustian – Acting Corporate Performance and Insight Manager
Shirley Vaughan – Performance and Planning Officer

External Officers:

Alexandra Bailey – Service Manager for Supported Transport, Oxfordshire County Council

Scrutiny Topics 2015/16 – Links to Corporate Priorities	
Performance Monitoring	Covers all priorities
Business Plan 2016/17	Covers all priorities
Recycling – Informal Task & Finish Panel	Safe, Green, Clean
Strategic Review of Recycling	Safe, Green Clean
Safeguarding	Safe, Green, Clean
Youth Engagement – Informal Task & Finish Panel	A District of Opportunity
Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride	A District of Opportunity
Planning Policy and allocation of Rural Housing	A District of Opportunity
Customer Insights Reporting	Sound Budgets and a Customer Focussed Council
Website – Informal Task & Finish Panel	Sound Budgets and a Customer Focussed Council

Link to Corporate Priorities: thriving communities

Performance Monitoring

Each quarter the Overview and Scrutiny Committee reviewed the Council's performance as measured through the Performance Management Framework. Annual Performance was reviewed in June 2015, with Quarter 1, 2 and 3 reports being considered in September and November 2015, and February 2016 respectively. As in previous years, the Council's generally excellent performance was readily acknowledged and praised. Where necessary the Committee requested further information to help explain particular areas of performance, such as the annual Customer Satisfaction Survey for Waste and Recycling.

Involvement in the drafting of the Business Plan 2016/17

In January 2016 the Committee reviewed the Priorities and Pledges included in the draft 2016/17 Business Plan. The Committee welcomed the report, and made several suggestions regarding minor amendments to wording, all of which were incorporated into the final draft and approved by Council in February. The suggestion was also made that more preventative action and promotion regarding the level of rubbish left across the District should be undertaken, in order to reduce the need for neighbourhood litter blitzes.

Link to Corporate Priorities: Safe, green, clean

Recycling – Informal Task & Finish Panel.

In October 2014 the Committee established an informal Task & Finish Panel to undertake a review of the Council's recycling performance, and work continued into the new Municipal Year.

The Working Group met with the Head of Environmental Services who explained about the changes in commodity values for recycled materials.

In January the Committee agreed to bring the informal panel to an end, as the work had been superseded by the Strategic Review of Recycling.

Strategic Review of Recycling

In September 2015 the Head of Environmental Services attended the meeting to give the Committee an overview of the Strategic Review of Recycling.

The Head of Environmental Services explained about the change in values for recycled materials, and an increase in gate fees at some recycling centres. These changes meant that for the recycling rate to be improved, additional spend would be required.

Oxfordshire County Council were also consulting on proposals to make changes to their own waste arrangements, including the potential closure of the Ardley facility. The Head of Environmental Services advised that the Council would be submitting a response to the consultation.

Safeguarding

In October 2015 and January 2016, the Committee considered reports relating to Safeguarding. The initial report gave the Committee an overview of work that was taking place in relation to Safeguarding following several high-profile cases of Child Sexual Exploitation and Extremism. An independent review of safeguarding was commissioned, and in January 2016 the Committee considered the action plan which had been put together following the conclusion of the review.

Part of the action plan included a recommendation that the Committee receive an annual report on safeguarding activities and progress, to coincide with the completion of a Section 11 self-assessment audit

Link to Corporate Priorities: A District of Opportunity

Youth Engagement – Informal Task & Finish Panel.

At its meeting in October 2014 the Committee established an informal Task & Finish Panel to review the Council's activities with respect to youth engagement.

The working group looked to establish links between the Council and each school in the District, by appointing a named Councillor to take on the role of 'school champion'. The Champion would visit their school, to find out what issues and concerns the students have.

Community Transport and Dial-a-Ride

During September and October 2014, the Committee reviewed the voluntary and community transport provision in the district, which included Dial-a-Ride; Volunteer Car Services; Banbury Volunteer Bureau; Royal Voluntary Service, and the Non-Emergency Patient Transport Service. With regard to the Dial-a-Ride Service, the Committee were made aware of potential phased changes to the service arising from Oxfordshire County Council's (OCC) Supported Transport Programme Review.

In June 2015, OCC's Service Manager for Supported Transport attended the meeting and updated the Committee on the proposals, which included withdrawing funding for the Dial-a-Ride service but instead helping community transport groups set up their own equivalent service. The proposals were subject to consultation, which was due to take place during the summer.

Planning policy and the allocation of Rural Housing

In October 2015, officers from the Housing team attending the meeting to discuss Planning Policy and the allocation of Rural Housing. The issue had been referred to the Committee by the Executive, who had raised concerns on the issue after considering and approving a new Allocations Policy at its meeting in June 2015.

The Head of Regeneration and his team explained that a new 'reserve' list had been created following changes to the Allocations Policy, which meant that people who didn't qualify for the statutory housing list could apply for other types of housing in certain areas.

Link to Corporate Priorities: Sound budgets and customer focussed Council

Customer Insights Reporting

During July the Committee reviewed Customer Insight Report, noting consultation results; satisfaction regarding particular services; complaints; media enquiries, social media, and website interaction.

The Performance Team advised the Committee that the reporting method for Customer Insight would be changing, and it would be incorporated into the quarterly performance monitoring instead.

Website - Informal Task & Finish Panel.

At its meeting in January 2015 the Committee established an informal Task & Finish Panel to undertake a review of the Council's website with a remit to understand the process of determining the Who, What, and How of populating and maintaining the Council's website; understand how the general public's needs and views are collated and then assessed; understand how the Council's needs and views are collated and reviewed, and identify possible areas of improvement / change.

The working group had a meeting with the then Joint Head of ICT Business Services, who agreed to keep the Committee involved in the website project. However, following the departure of the Head of Service, the Committee had difficulties in receiving updates on the project.

In February 2016 the Project Manager – New Business & Systems Implementation advised the Committee that the project had been put on hold, pending a decision on whether to revert the 3-way ICT Team to a 2-way team between Cherwell and South Northamptonshire and any knock-on implications of that decision.

The Committee noted the update, but agreed to keep the project on the work programme in order to revisit it once the impact of the decision to revert to a 2-way was known.