



**Meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee**  
**Wednesday, 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2016 at 6.00pm**  
**In Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Priory Road, Dudley**

**Agenda - Public Session**  
**(Meeting open to the public and press)**

1. Apologies for absence.
2. To report the appointment of any substitute members serving for this meeting of the Committee.
3. To receive any declarations of interest under the Members' Code of Conduct.
4. To approve the minutes of the meeting of the Place Scrutiny Committee held on 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2016.
5. Public Forum
6. Terms of Reference for the Place Scrutiny Committee (Pages 1 – 6)
7. Annual Scrutiny Programme 2016/17 (Pages 7 – 9)
8. To consider any questions from Members to the Chair where two clear days notice has been given to the Monitoring Officer (Council Procedure Rule 11.8).

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Sarah Noun". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

**Chief Executive**

**Dated: 28<sup>th</sup> June, 2016**

**Distribution:**

**Members of the Place Scrutiny Committee:**

Councillor A Finch (Chair)

Councillor M Aston (Vice Chair)

Councillors L Johnson, Z Islam, I Kettle, C Perks, H Rogers, M Rogers, R Scott-Dow, K Shakespeare and V Wale.

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## **Minutes of the Place Scrutiny Committee**

**Wednesday 30<sup>th</sup> March, 2016 at 6.00 pm**  
**in Committee Room 2 at the Council House, Dudley**

### **Present:**

Councillor A Finch (Chair)  
Councillor M Aston (Vice-Chair)  
Councillors J Hill, Z Islam, K Jordan, I Kettle, D Perks, H Rogers, K Shakespeare, G Simms and E Taylor.

### **Officers:**

M Williams - Chief Officer Corporate and Customer Services (Lead Officer to the Committee); A Lunt, Strategic Director Place; P Coyne, Chief Officer Planning and Economic Development; M Rodgers, Chief Officer Housing; S Evans – Head of Housing Options and Support, I Gardner – Head of Housing Maintenance (both Place Directorate) and M Johal – Democratic Services Officer (Resources and Transformation Directorate)

### 27 **Declarations of Interest**

No Member made a declaration of interest in respect of any matter to be considered at this meeting.

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### 28 **Minutes**

#### **Resolved**

That the minutes of the meeting held on 20<sup>th</sup> January, 2016, be approved as a correct record and signed.

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### 29 **Housing Voids**

A report of the Strategic Director Place was submitted on work undertaken to review processes and procedures for work undertaken in void properties with a view to reducing ad-hoc expenditure, delivering a more strategic approach to investment in the Council's Housing Stock and reviewing how properties were allocated.

In presenting the report the Chief Officer Housing referred to paragraph 10 of the report and informed Members on minor amendments in that figures in the first and second bullet point should read 124 and 131 instead of 59 and 196.

Arising from the presentation of the report Members made comments and raised queries as follows:-

- Reference was made to the number of empty and void properties and mention was made of a particular dwelling that had been vacant for approximately fifteen years. Also another property had been boarded up for a considerable period of time and it was suggested that decisions to determine the future of these types of properties be made swiftly given high investment needs.
- Although it was accepted that turnaround times had reduced Members were still concerned and were of the view that turnaround times following repairs and maintenance should be further reduced.
- Reference was made to high rise flats and it was queried whether these buildings would be demolished given the significant challenge for the Council with this house type not performing and representing a significant liability in the long term.
- The number of requests for transfers was queried given that letting transfers generated additional empty properties.
- It was requested that a breakdown of recharges to tenants for repairs under the recharging policy be provided.
- The number of properties that were void and empty above a 2 year period was queried.
- In referring to properties categorised as “red properties” it was queried whether these were concentrated in certain areas.
- Properties that remained empty for long periods of time were prone to vandalism. It was also queried whether there were specific properties that were more frequently empty than others and if so the reasons for this.
- Empty and void properties were an eyesore and impacted upon the amenity of the area and it was considered that a non-political Group comprising Members and Officers be set up to consider issues further. There was a need to preserve current housing stock and discussions should commence on matters such as considering the needs of the elderly concerning adaptations to properties and affordability factors.
- Although Members welcomed the improvements it was stated that the Cabinet Member Housing be urged to develop a framework to include timescales for re-letting void properties and that decisions on the future of properties be made swiftly.

The following responses were given by Officers in relation to queries and comments made above:-

- It was acknowledged that fifteen years was an extremely long period of time for a property to be empty given associated costs which could negate its value. There were three categories of turnaround times for re-let and although average re-let times had somewhat reduced it was pointed out that the work undertaken to bring long term voids back into use was having a temporary negative impact upon overall re-let times. However, it was pointed out that remodelling of housing stock would further reduce these figures.
- With regard to high rise flats it was stated that relevant data was available and would be used to determine the future of high rise flats with a view to appropriate recommendations being made.
- In relation to letting transfers it was acknowledged that every transfer generated a void property, however, it was stated that following stricter procedures being placed on tenancy agreements it had reduced transfer requests by 30%. It was further stated that there had been 1650 lettings last year of which 450 had been transfers.
- The average age of housing stock was 65 – 70 years old. However, there was necessarily no correlation between the age of a property and high investment needs and there could be other reasons for accumulation of costs such as problems with accessing properties in order to carry out programmed improvements.
- The Chief Officer Housing stated that spending on repairs and maintenance under the recharging policy was low and he undertook to provide Members with information relating to expenditure in this regard.
- With regard to distribution of properties categorised as red stock it was stated that they were not in one specific area and the Chief Officer Housing undertook to provide further detailed information to a future meeting.
- It was confirmed that a total number of eighty eight properties had been empty for two years and above.
- In relation to a query about details on information used to determine values and categorisation of red, amber and green properties, the Chief Officer Housing explained that a whole range of indicators had been used such as considering the number of days a property was void, whether the property had a quick turnover and the property's energy efficiency or Standard Assessment Procedure (SAP) rating. The Chief Officer Housing undertook to provide further information on the methodology for the categorisation to a future meeting of the Committee.
- Reasons why some properties were regularly empty may be connected to antisocial behaviour problems and this type of detail would be considered when assessing stock.

Members made further comments in that consideration should also be given to preventative measures, pursuing legal avenues where gaining access to properties was a problem, the need to balance escalation of costs against void properties and that properties such as bungalows should be designated and retained for the elderly.

The Head of Housing Options and Support stated that bungalows were generally allocated to the elderly, however a young person with a medical priority could legitimately be re-housed into a 'level access' single storey property such as a bungalow.

The Strategic Director Place commented that it was clear that consideration would need to be given to disposing high investment need, low demand properties. Regardless of the housing crisis, there were a significant number of low demand voids which clearly could not sustain demand. Arising from the IS4 report and initial assessments proposals would be made on whether to dispose of, demolish or to repair and re-let 'red' rate properties. There was also a need to consider whether the lack of an appropriate tenure mix may impact upon demand. Modern thinking sought to integrate social housing with market housing which was very different from the model reflected in Dudley whereby large 'single tenure' social housing estates existed. These types of estates impacted upon the ability of an area to sustain demand as many similar properties in a small geographical area were less resilient and sustainable than mixed tenure/mixed income areas.

In concluding the debate the Chair and Members thanked Officers and their teams on achievements and improvements made and urged them to continue the momentum.

### **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report on housing voids and the work undertaken to reduce the cost of works in empty homes together with the strategic approach proposed for housing stock investment, be noted and supported.
- (2) That the Cabinet Member Housing be requested to consider comments made above particularly those relating to the need to develop a framework to include timescales for re-letting void properties and the need to make swift decisions on proposals relating to the future of the Council's housing stock..

A report of the Strategic Director Place was submitted to update the meeting following the detailed consideration of the Business Friendly Planning project by this Scrutiny Committee at its meeting held in November, 2015.

## **Resolved**

- (1) That the information contained in the report on the Business Friendly Planning project be noted.
  - (2) That the final Statement of Community Involvement be submitted to a future meeting of the Committee prior to its adoption by Council in November, 2016.
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### 31 **Comments by the Chair and Members of the Committee**

The Chair together with Members of the Committee expressed their best wishes to Mike Williams, Chief Officer Corporate and Customer Services (Lead Officer to the Committee) on his imminent retirement.

This being the last Committee meeting in the 2015/16 financial year Members thanked the Chair for the professional manner in which he had conducted meetings throughout the year.

The meeting ended at 7.30 pm.

CHAIR

**Place Scrutiny Committee – 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

**Report of the Lead for Law and Governance**

**Terms of Reference for the Place Scrutiny Committee**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To note the terms of reference for the Place Scrutiny Committee.

**Background**

2. At the meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2016, a report was considered on the terms of reference of the Board and the Council's overview and scrutiny Committees.
3. The Council's scrutiny arrangements are set out in Part 2, Article 6 of the Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny). The associated Scrutiny Procedure Rules are contained within Part 4 of the Constitution which also contains the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Committee. These terms of reference are attached as an Appendix for information.

**Finance**

4. The costs of operating the revised scrutiny structure will be contained within existing budgetary allocations.

**Law**

5. Scrutiny Committees are established in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the requirements of the Council's Constitution, which was adopted under the Local Government Act 2000, subsequent legislation and associated Regulations and Guidance.

The Council's scrutiny arrangements are set out in Part 2, Article 6 of the Constitution (Overview and Scrutiny) and the associated Scrutiny Procedure Rules are contained within Part 4.

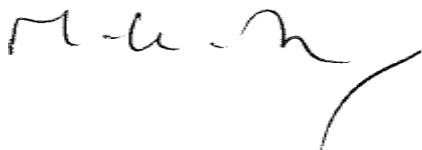


## **Equality Impact**

6. Provision exists within the recommended scrutiny arrangements for overview and scrutiny to be undertaken of the Council's policies on equality and diversity.

## **Recommendations**

7. That the terms of reference for the Scrutiny Committee, as set out in the attached Appendix, be noted.



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**Mohammed Farooq**  
**Lead for Law and Governance**

Contact Officers:

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## **List of Background Papers**

The Council's Constitution

## **TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE PLACE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **Membership**

11 Councillors.

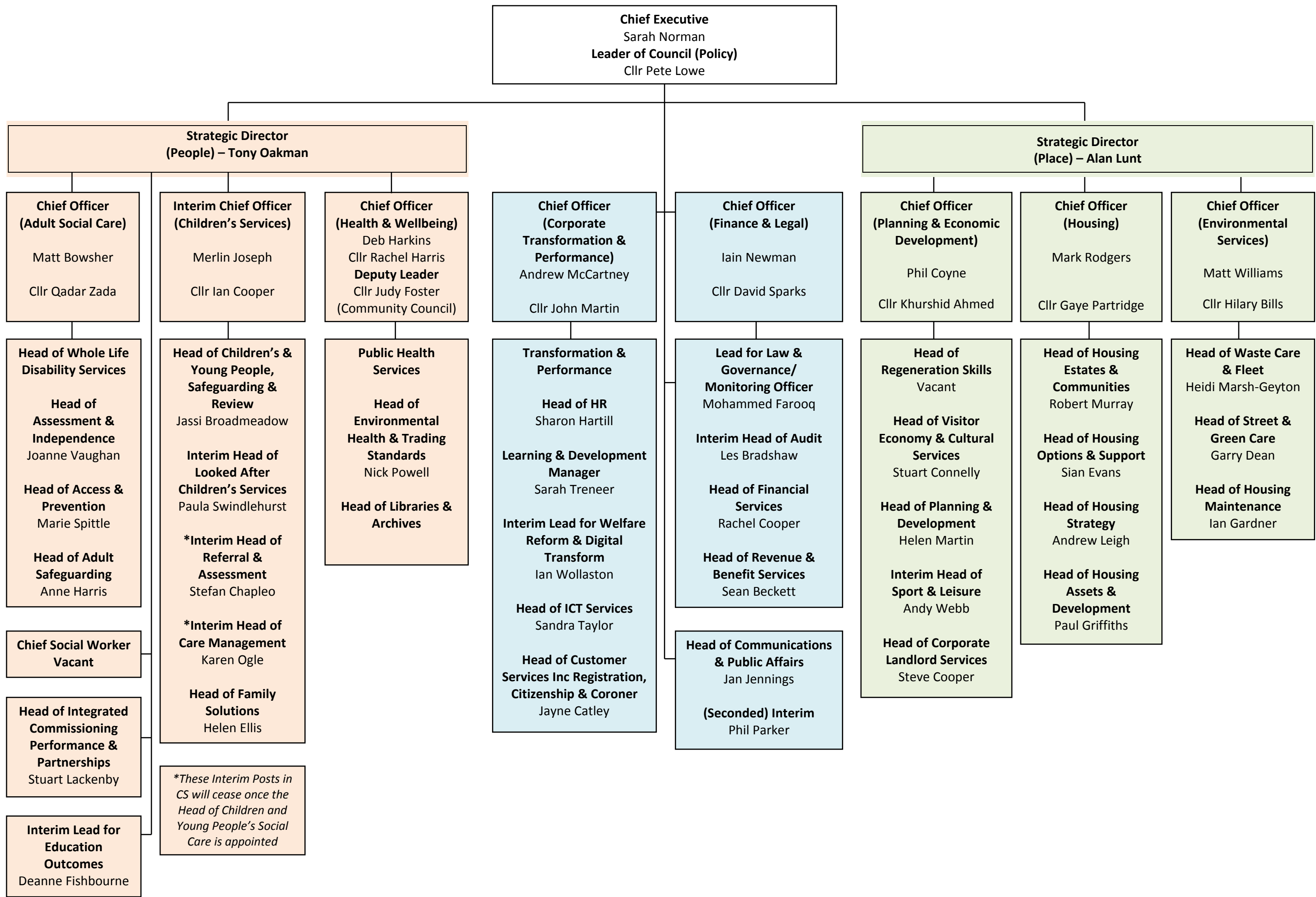
### **Terms of Reference**

In accordance with any relevant statutory requirements and the Annual Scrutiny Programme approved by the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board:-

- (a) To undertake in-depth scrutiny investigations, inquiries and reviews in accordance with the Annual Scrutiny Programme;
- (b) To contribute to policy development by carrying out the scrutiny of matters falling within the functions of the Directorate of Place and the portfolios of the Cabinet Members for Planning and Economic Development, Environmental Services and Housing.

To submit reports and recommendations to the Cabinet and/or the Council on the outcomes of scrutiny investigations, inquiries and reviews.

To make recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Board on any proposed amendments to the Annual Scrutiny Programme.



**CABINET**

Leader and Cabinet Member for Policy  
Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member for Community Council  
Cabinet Member for Adult Social Care  
Cabinet Member for Children's Services  
Cabinet Member for Corporate Transformation and Performance  
Cabinet Member for Environmental Services  
Cabinet Member for Finance and Legal Services  
Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing  
Cabinet Member for Housing  
Cabinet Member for Planning and Economic Development

**COMMUNITY FORUMS**

- Amblecote, Cradley & Wollescote and Lye & Stourbridge North
- Belle Vale and Hayley Green & Cradley South
- Brierley Hill and Brockmoor & Pensnett
- Castle & Priory, St James's and St Thomas's
- Coseley East & Sedgley
- Gornal and Upper Gornal & Woodsetton
- Halesowen North and Halesowen South
- Kingswinford North & Wall Health, Kingswinford South and Wordsley
- Netherton, Woodside & St Andrews and Quarry Bank & Dudley Wood
- Norton, Pedmore & Stourbridge East and Wollaston & Stourbridge Town

**OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY  
MANAGEMENT BOARD**

Children's Services  
Scrutiny Committee

Corporate Scrutiny Committee

Health and Adult Social Care  
Scrutiny Committee

Place Scrutiny Committee

**STATUTORY AND REGULATORY  
COMMITTEES**

Appeals Committee  
Appointments Committee  
Audit and Standards Committee  
- Standards Sub-Committee  
Development Control Committee  
Dudley Health and Wellbeing Board  
Ernest Stevens Trusts Management Committee  
Licensing and Safety Committee  
- Licensing Sub-Committees (x4)  
Taxis Committee

## **SCRUTINY CHAIR**

### **Role**

To take a lead role in co-ordinating scrutiny activities in accordance with the Committee's terms of reference and the approved Annual Scrutiny Programme.

To ensure that the business of the Scrutiny Committee is conducted in line with the Constitution and legal requirements so as to ensure transparency and accountability within the Council's decision making and governance arrangements.

### **Duties and Responsibilities**

1. To attend and Chair meetings to ensure the efficient transaction of business in line with the Council's Constitution.
2. To work with the Vice-Chair, Lead Officer and Scrutiny/Democratic Services Officers to co-ordinate the activities and the work programme of the Scrutiny Committee.
3. To foster and maintain a disciplined approach by Members involved in Scrutiny having regard to the requirements of Council's Constitution and the Members' Code of Conduct.
4. To attend, promote and encourage participation in Member training and development activity.
5. To take a lead role in:
  - monitoring the Council's decision-making processes, ensuring that decisions are consistent with Council policy and the budgetary framework.
  - scrutinising the activities of the Cabinet, Cabinet Members and Officers taking executive decisions.
  - inviting Cabinet Members, Officers and others to attend meetings of the Scrutiny Committee to answer questions where appropriate.
  - presenting reports from the Scrutiny Committee to the Cabinet and/or Council.
6. To act as a focus for liaison between the Council and its communities and partners in relation to scrutiny functions.
7. To represent the Council on any other bodies or groups as appropriate in connection with scrutiny functions.

**Place Scrutiny Committee – 6<sup>th</sup> July, 2016**

**Report of the Lead for Law and Governance**

**Annual Scrutiny Programme 2016/17**

**Purpose of Report**

1. To confirm the items included in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for detailed consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2016/17.

**Background**

2. Meetings of this Scrutiny Committee have been scheduled, on the dates below, to carry out scrutiny reviews and consider any other items of business during the municipal year. All Scrutiny Committees will also undertake detailed scrutiny of the Council's revenue budget proposals in November.
  - Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> September, 2016
  - Tuesday 15<sup>th</sup> November, 2016
  - Monday 30<sup>th</sup> January, 2017
  - Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> March, 2017
3. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Board met on 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2016 to give consideration to draft items for inclusion in the Annual Scrutiny Plan. The report to that meeting is available on the [Council's website](#)
4. Following consultation with the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of Scrutiny Committees, the following items are proposed for detailed consideration by this Scrutiny Committee during 2016/17:

**Regeneration and Tourism**

The main elements of the regeneration agenda which has previously been explored by the Place Scrutiny Committee and the former DUE Scrutiny Committee have revolved around Dudley Business First in relation to business support and inward investment activities and (last year) business friendly planning in terms of the interface between the planning system and the business community. Should members choose, the key area with potential here would probably be around recent town centre regeneration projects. However, members may prefer to look at the developing area of Dudley's visitor economy which would link to key recent regeneration projects such as Castle Hill, town centre public realm improvements and the new glass museum at Wordsley, but would also provide the committee with the opportunity to call witnesses from the wider visitor economy sector across the borough to explore the effectiveness of how the council and partners currently work together and to look at potential

improvements as we develop this work area in the next 12 months.

5. A brief summary of the following topics will also be provided by the relevant Chief Officer at the meeting:
  - Housing
  - Recycling and Waste Collection
  - School crossing patrols
6. During this cycle of meetings, each Scrutiny Committee is being requested:
  - To consider the urgency/priority order in which the above items should be scrutinised during the year (taking account of the need for some flexibility).
  - To define the scope and methodology for each scrutiny review along with the timescales for submitting reports/recommendations to the Cabinet and/or Council.
7. Subject to the views of the Committee at this meeting, the Lead Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair and the Democratic Services Officer, will make the necessary practical arrangements for the Committee to conduct its agreed programme of work during 2016/17.

### **Finance**

8. The costs of operating the scrutiny arrangements will be contained within existing budgetary allocations.

### **Law**

9. Scrutiny Committees are established in accordance with the provisions of the Local Government Act 1972 and the requirements of the Council's Constitution, which was adopted under the Local Government Act 2000, subsequent legislation and associated Regulations and Guidance.

### **Equality Impact**

10. Provision exists within the Council's scrutiny arrangements for overview and scrutiny to be undertaken of the Council's policies on equality and diversity.

### **Recommendations**

11. That the items to be scrutinised by this Committee, as contained in the Annual Scrutiny Programme for 2016/17, be confirmed.
12. That the Committee give initial consideration to the proposed issues referred to in paragraphs 4 and 5 of this report.
13. That the Lead Officer, in consultation with the Chair and Vice-Chair and the Democratic Services Officer, be authorised to make all the necessary arrangements to enable this Committee to undertake its programme of scrutiny work during the 2016/17 municipal year.



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**List of Background Papers**

Report to Overview and Scrutiny Management Board – 8<sup>th</sup> June, 2016 – Annual Scrutiny Programme 2016/17