

# **Guidance for Witnesses Giving Evidence at Overview and Scrutiny Committee Meetings**

**Redditch Borough Council  
2007**

## **What is Overview and Scrutiny?**

The elected Councillors at Redditch Borough Council work to represent the interests of their constituents. The councillors that are members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee review policies and make recommendations about how to improve existing services. The committee often delegates review work to Task and Finish Groups. These groups investigate an issue in detail and are dissolved once a project has been completed.

The Overview & Scrutiny process draws on evidence from Councillors, Council Officers and from sources outside the Council. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee cannot work successfully in isolation. The council, therefore, calls on the expertise of local people, service partners and community groups to ensure the Council delivers effective services.

## **Why have I been invited to act as a witness?**

You have been invited to act as a witness because your views are important to the elected councillors. Your expert opinion can help councillors to gain an understanding of the issue that they are reviewing. As a guest of the Committee you will not be interrogated or asked questions that seek to catch you out. The councillors will attempt to put you at your ease as they realise that you have given up your time to help them. Notes will be taken of the proceedings. This is merely for the purpose of producing minutes of the meeting.

## **Is it compulsory to attend?**

It depends on who you are. Elected councillors and Council Officers must attend meetings if requested by Overview and Scrutiny Committee members. In addition, organisations which provide local public services must attend meetings when requested. These organisations may select a representative to attend the meeting on their behalf. This representative must understand the subject of the review and be capable of responding to questions. Attendance is not compulsory for any other witnesses who are asked to attend a meeting.

## **Can someone be nominated to attend on my behalf?**

If you cannot attend, you can nominate another person to come on your behalf. That person must be fully briefed on the issue. Committees sometimes invite an organisation to give evidence. In this case, it is up to you to decide who should attend.

It may be possible for the Committee to consider a written submission from you. The Committee may then come back to you at a later date if there are matters that have not been dealt with. This is something you can discuss with an Overview & Scrutiny Support Officer.

## **What if I cannot attend on the date of the Committee meeting?**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee groups witnesses together to help ease the flow of information. This also encourages detailed discussions of the topic because information from various sources can be reviewed at the same time. Committees work to tight timescales and so it is often impossible to rearrange meetings. As a consequence, it is important that you attend on the day requested.

## **Do witnesses get paid for attending Overview and Scrutiny meetings?**

You will not be paid for giving evidence at an Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting. However, travelling expenses as well as childcare costs can be reimbursed. Please retain your receipts and hand these to an Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer. The Officer will ensure that you are reimbursed for these costs.

## **Where are Overview and Scrutiny meetings held?**

Most of Redditch Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny meetings are held at Redditch Town Hall. The Town Hall is located in Walter Stranz Square in the Town Centre. The Town Hall's Committee Rooms are fully air-conditioned and have full access for people with disabilities. Parking facilities are available at the Town Hall during evenings and weekends. During office hours Car Park 2 is available adjacent to the Town Hall. The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer will inform you of the exact arrangements for your meeting.

When you arrive at the Town Hall report to reception and ask for the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer. The Officer will provide you with an ID card, will discuss the proceedings with you and will show you to your seat in the council chamber.

## **Who will be present at the meeting?**

A number of Councillors and Council Officers, including the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer, will be present at the meeting. Co-opted members may also attend the meeting if it addresses a topic which is of interest to them. These co-optees may include trade union representatives, from UNISON and/or UCATT, and people representing the Borough's tenants' panel. Other witnesses may also have been invited to give evidence at the meeting.

Many Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings are open to the public. You may, therefore, find that members of the public or press attend the proceedings. If you feel that the presence of the public or press would make you feel uncomfortable please contact the Overview & Scrutiny Support Officer to discuss the matter further. (The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers contact details are listed on the back page of these guidance notes).

## **Will I have to give a presentation?**

Sometimes the Committee asks witnesses to give a short presentation. Presentations at Overview and Scrutiny meetings usually take ten minutes. The Overview and Scrutiny Support Officer will inform you in advance if you are required to give a presentation. On other occasions the Councillors will ask you to answer a number of questions. If you are expected to answer questions at the meeting you will be sent a copy of the questions in advance. You may find it convenient to prepare your answers before the meeting takes place. The Councillors may ask you some additional questions based on the answers that you provide. They may also ask for your opinion about evidence provided by other witnesses at the meeting.

Alternatively, you may be asked to submit written evidence to the meeting. Any written evidence should include the main points of your opinion about the subject being discussed. If you submit the written evidence in advance please assume that the members have read the document before the meeting takes place.

## **How are witnesses treated at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings?**

Redditch Borough Council is committed to treating witnesses in a respectful and courteous manner. Please be aware that information about individuals who give evidence, such as addresses, is only available to senior Officers. The council will not give your personal details to other organisations or individuals.

## **What will happen after the meeting?**

About a week after the meeting we will send you a copy of the meeting's minutes summarising the main arguments that were made. The minutes may quote some of the things that you said. You will have the opportunity to suggest amendments to the minutes. You will be informed of a cut-off date by which any changes to the minutes will need to be made. The Councillors may also ask for you to provide additional information to the committee.

Once the councillors have finished collecting evidence, they will produce a report summarising their findings. The report will make recommendations for future action. This report will acknowledge any sources of written and oral evidence provided to the Councillors.

As a valued contributor to the Committee the council will keep you informed on future progress. We will send you a copy of the Overview & Scrutiny Committee's final report with its recommendations. You will also be informed of the outcomes of this report, including whether the recommendations will be implemented.

The Councillors will monitor any implementation of the report's recommendations. You will be kept informed of related developments. You may also be invited to attend future meetings that monitor the outcomes of the proceedings.

## **Further Information:**

If you require any further information about Overview and Scrutiny arrangements at Redditch Borough Council you can obtain it from our website at <http://redditch.whub.org.uk/home/rbc-your-council-overview-and-scrutiny> You will find information on this site about the role of Overview and Scrutiny in local democracy, Redditch Borough Council's Overview and Scrutiny procedures and the aims of Overview and Scrutiny. You can also access an Overview and Scrutiny library, containing archive material produced for past Overview and Scrutiny reviews.

Once the review has finished you will be invited to give feedback on participating in the Overview and Scrutiny process. Your feedback will be valued and will contribute to continuous improvement of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Redditch Borough Council.

If you have any further concerns or wish to have an informal chat about contributing to the Overview and Scrutiny process at Redditch Borough Council please contact one of the dedicated Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers.

## **Sources:**

OPSI, (The Office of Public Sector Information), (accessed May 2007), The Local Government Act 2000, <http://www.opsi.gov.uk/Acts/acts2000/20000022.htm>  
DCLG (Department for Communities and Local Government), (October 2006), 'Strong and Prosperous Communities: The Local Government White Paper' [http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/98/StrongandProsperousCommunitiestheLocalGovernmentWhitePaperVol1\\_id1504098.pdf](http://www.communities.gov.uk/pub/98/StrongandProsperousCommunitiestheLocalGovernmentWhitePaperVol1_id1504098.pdf)

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