

1. New Overview and Scrutiny Arrangements

This year the Council changed the democratic structures for the scrutiny process by reducing the number of Overview and Scrutiny Committees to one parent Overview and Scrutiny Committee. One of its primary functions is to act as a commissioning body. Therefore, this year Members have concentrated more than in previous years upon scrutinising issues through specific Task and Finish Group exercises. The Committee has been steered by both a new Chair and a new Vice-Chair and supported by two new Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers.

ACTION: Members to note these comments.

2. Chairs' Briefing

Prior to every Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers meet with the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Committee for a 'Chairs' Briefing'. This meeting provides a useful opportunity for the Chair and Vice-Chair to go through the agenda, to identify urgent business and to clarify points that may be raised during the meeting.

ACTION: The Chair's Briefing meeting should continue to take place.

3. Service Plans, Quarterly Performance and Budget Monitoring Reports

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee receives a copy of the Council's Service Plans annually and performance and budget monitoring reports on a quarterly basis. The Chair and Vice-Chair have expressed an interest in receiving formal presentations by Senior Officers to accompany the written documents to help clarify the contents of these reports and help Member understanding. Officers have already started to address the presentation of the quarterly performance report and the proposed scrutiny exercise exploring the Council's priorities, which was recently proposed by the Chair of the Committee, may help Members and Officers to add real value.

ACTION: Further consideration to be given to the presentation and treatment of the Council's Service Plans, quarterly monitoring and budget reports.

4. New Members

To ensure that new members of the Council understand the role of Overview and Scrutiny in the Council's democratic process it would be useful for any who are not appraised with the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to attend at least one meeting of the Committee. Corporate Induction training, which should introduce all Members to Overview and Scrutiny, should continue to be provided.

ACTION: New Members to attend at least one meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

5. Apologies

Members need to be as timely as possible when tendering apologies for Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Task and Finish Group meetings.

ACTION: Members to give apologies for absence in advance of meetings.

6. Overview and Scrutiny Committee Agenda

This year the Overview and Scrutiny Committee has established a largely mechanistic agenda that was designed to enable the Committee to progress through the business of the meeting. The Chair and Vice-Chair propose that in future years the agenda should allow Members to focus on subjects of interest to enable the Committee to contribute more directly to the policy review process. It is further proposed that in future years the agenda should be used to engage all Members on the Committee in an initial discussion of proposed scrutiny exercises prior to scoping documents being prepared and submitted. As a consequence, the Committee may produce more recommendations through shorter review work as well as identify the scope for Task and Finish Group activities collectively.

ACTION: The agenda to be constructed to allow Members to be directly involved in the discussion and review of items of interest.

7. Call-in and the Forward Plan

At present there is a standard item on the agenda that requires Members to address the Decision Notice and to indicate whether they would like to Call-in any of the key decisions that were made at the preceding Executive Committee meeting. This item has not resulted in any call ins or discussions of Executive decisions. In addition, Members are not required to review the contents of the Forward Plan until they consider the Work Programme. Unfortunately this has encouraged the Committee to focus on the Work Programme to the detriment of consideration of the Forward Plan. To address this situation it might be appropriate to ensure that both documents are addressed together as a standard item on the agenda.

ACTION: The Overview and Scrutiny Committee to add consideration of the need for any call-ins and the Forward Plan as a standard item on their agenda.

8. Relations between the Executive and Overview and Scrutiny Committees

Interaction between the Executive Committee and Overview and Scrutiny Committee is minimal. Progress has been made this year as Portfolio Holders have been required, for the first time, to present Annual Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. However, Members may want to strengthen links further to build more productive working relationships with the Executive Committee and to effectively influence the Executive Committee when making recommendations about policy development.

ACTION: Members to investigate further ways to strengthen the links between the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and the Executive Committee.

9. Setting the Work Programme

This year the Work Programme has been reviewed at every meeting of the Committee. However, the Overview and Scrutiny Members identified a need to improve the management of the Work Programme in future years. The Committee Members, based on examples of best practice at other local authorities, have agreed to attend a Planning Day in May 2008 to organise the Work Programme for 2008/09. During the away-day Members will prioritise items for scrutiny. This Planning Day should reinforce the fact that this is a Member led process by enabling Members to identify dates and presentation styles for the various pieces of work that are presented to the Committee throughout the year. Members could reinforce the links between the Overview and Scrutiny and the Executive Committees by engaging Executive

Members in the Planning Day activities.

ACTION: Members to attend a Planning Day in May 2008 to set the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programme.

10. Portfolio Holder Annual Reports

These reports were introduced for the first time this year. The Chair and Vice-Chair have agreed that the arrangements for these presentations need to be reviewed. Members have appreciated the initial presentations which have acted as an introduction to the work of the Portfolio Holders. The Chair and Vice-Chair suggest that in future years the Portfolio Holders should be required to concentrate on reporting developments relevant to their Portfolio and the actions that they have undertaken as Portfolio Holder. The Chair and the Vice-Chair request that all Overview and Scrutiny Members are well prepared in advance of these presentations in such a way to listen to and to question the Portfolio Holders constructively.

ACTION: Portfolio Holder Annual Reports to adapt in future years to reflect developments relevant to the Portfolios and the action of the Portfolio Holders.

11. Director Annual Reports

The Chair and the Vice-Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee have noted that the Council's priorities largely reflect the directorate responsibilities of the Council. The Chair and Vice-Chair have therefore requested that the Council's four Directors, like the Portfolio Holders, produce Annual Reports for the consideration of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. Members would consider the contents of these reports with a view to identifying items / policies / activities that might require further scrutiny.

ACTION: The four Directors to present Annual Reports to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

12. Involving the Public in Overview and Scrutiny

Members of the public have been engaged in specific pieces of scrutiny work. In addition, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers regularly update the content of the Overview and Scrutiny web pages on the Council's website. However, the frequency with which members of the public access this web

based information is difficult to determine. Moreover, more could be done to engage with people in the local community. In particular, Members could publish press releases advertising the work of particular Task and Finish Groups when Members of a Group believe that the exercise might benefit from engagement with the public and / or where a matter is felt to be in the public interest.

ACTION: Members to explore options for engaging further with the public as part of the Overview and Scrutiny process.

13. Chairing Task and Finish Groups

Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee are required to Chair Task and Finish Group exercises. There have been concerns about the capacity of Overview and Scrutiny Members to Chair all Task and Finish Groups. It may be advisable, therefore, to ensure that members of the Committee Chair only one Task and Finish Group each at any one time. This role enhances the status of Overview and Scrutiny Members. It also provides Members on the Overview and Scrutiny Committee with an opportunity to develop their chairing skills so there would be benefits to continuing with this approach.

ACTION: Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to continue to Chair Task and Finish Group exercises.

14. Scoping Document

This year the scoping document for proposed Task and Finish Groups has been developed in line with examples of best practice. The document is a useful mechanism for contextualising the topic and for identifying the aims and objectives of the exercise. However, the layout of this document needs to be simplified, possibly into a one page format. The content of this document should contain a realistic estimated completion date for the exercise.

ACTION: The layout of the scrutiny scoping document to be simplified.

15. Launching Task and Finish Group Exercises

The scoping document provides the framework for the Task and Finish Group exercise. Therefore, it is important for the Members on the Task and Finish Group to be familiar with the contents of the scoping document. To embed

this familiarity the first meeting of any Task and Finish Group should focus upon familiarising the Members on the Group with the contents of the document and requirements of the review. Generally, issues which are to be subject to a scoping document should be subject to a wide ranging discussion by members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

ACTION: The first meeting of a Task and Finish Group exercise to focus on familiarising Members of the Group with the contents of the scoping document.

16. Number of Members on a Task and Finish Group

This year either five or eight Members have participated in Task and Finish Group exercises. A membership of five has proved to be more manageable. Groups of eight Members are less flexible as it can be difficult to organise meeting dates which a majority of Members can attend. Also, when there are high numbers of Councillors participating in Task and Finish Group exercises there can be capacity problems.

ACTION: Each Task and Finish Group to have a maximum of five Members.

17. Selecting Members for Task and Finish Group exercises

More effective use could be made of the Members who are available to take part in Task and Finish Group exercises. When Members volunteer for new Task and Finish Groups they should take account of their current commitments and their ability to commit time and effort to the exercise. This should help to address capacity problems by ensuring that some Members do not feel overwhelmed by scrutiny work whilst other Members do not feel they are missing an active role in the Council. The Chair and Vice-Chair should reflect on these capacity issues when confirming final membership of a Task and Finish Group activity.

ACTION: Member capacity should be considered when arranging membership for Task and Finish Group exercises.

18. Number of Task and Finish Groups

The number of Task and Finish Groups in operation at any one time requires consideration. This year the Task and Finish Groups that have been

established have tended to focus on large strategic issues. This does enable non-executive Members to contribute significantly to policy development in areas of importance to the Council. However, these topics are so wide ranging that they will take a long time to complete, thereby reducing the number of recommendations that can be issued through the Overview and Scrutiny process during the year. It may be useful in future years for Members to agree a balance of strategic review pieces and short, sharp reviews.

ACTION: Members to have a mix of strategic Task and Finish Group activities and short, sharp reviews in future years.

19. Timescales for Task and Finish Group meetings

Arrangements need to take into account Member capacity as well as the capacity of the two Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers to support meetings and the capacity of other officers required from time to time. Members need to recognise that when Officers are invited to attend meetings Members need to give Officers at least five working days notice about the subject / questions that they will be required to discuss as this provides them with time to prepare answers. Members need to be realistic about timescales and need to recognise that if they are requesting a lot of work Officers will probably need more than five working days to respond. However, meetings need to take place more frequently than once a month to ensure that a scrutiny exercise maintains momentum. Therefore, meetings every two-to-three weeks would probably be the most suitable arrangement for Task and Finish Group exercises.

ACTION: Task and Finish Groups to meet once every two-to-three weeks.

20. Presentation of Task and Finish Group recommendations

Members should have the flexibility to present recommendations in a manner that is appropriate for a particular Task and Finish Group exercise. The most appropriate arrangement could be decided by the Members of the Group.

ACTION: Recommendations to be presented in the most appropriate manner for the specific Task and Finish Group exercise.

21. Member concerns about Task and Finish Group exercises

Task and Finish Group Chairs should make sure they get the best out of Task and Finish Group Members and should regularly canvass Members to make sure all concerns and issues are recognised and addressed. Task and Finish Group Chairs should make sure that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members are fully aware and appraised of any concerns and issues associated with Task and Finish Group topics.

ACTION: Members to express any concerns they may have about a particular Task and Finish Group exercise.

22. Task and Finish Group reports at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Chairs of Task and Finish Groups need to be challenged more rigorously about the progress of Task and Finish Groups when reports are delivered at meetings of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Chair and Vice-Chair suggest that each Task and Finish Group Chair should be required to complete a written checklist for each meeting of the Committee. This would provide the basis for further Member questions, should enable the Committee to identify any problems and to consider possible ways to resolve the situation.

ACTION: Task and Finish Group Chairs to complete written checklists when reporting to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Committee Members to question the progress of Group exercises more rigorously.

23. Member Led Process: Interpretation

Members should encourage senior/expert Officers to contribute during Task and Finish Group exercises. This should not detract from the exercise being Member led. Final decisions are always made by Members. Moreover, contributions from expert witnesses are essential, as they can provide the details that will ensure final recommendations are evidence-based.

ACTION: Members to note that involving expert witnesses in scrutiny exercises will not detract from the process being Member led.

24. Senior Officer Induction Training

Senior Officers should receive some explanation and / or training to familiarise them with the role of Overview and Scrutiny in the Council's democratic system as part of their induction. This would ensure that senior Officers, many of whom will be invited to attend meetings of the Committee, are familiar with the process. Senior Officers should also be provided with updated information about developments in Overview and Scrutiny to retain familiarity with current practice. Officer understanding about how the Overview and Scrutiny process operates should then cascade down the organisation.

ACTION: An introduction to the Overview and Scrutiny process to be included in the induction training for senior Officers.

25. Officer Reports to Overview and Scrutiny

If Members have requested information from specific Officers for a particular meeting, the Overview and Scrutiny Support Officers will request that information and lobby Officers on their behalf. However, to ensure that the Members get that information by the date required, it would be useful if Members could emphasise the fact that the information must be timely directly with the relevant Officers.

ACTION: Members to be prepared to liaise directly with Officers.

26. Councillor Calls For Action: Future Consideration

The Councillor Call for Action was raised as an issue at a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and was referred to the Executive Committee for consideration. Further consideration must be given to how this will work in practice at Redditch Borough Council and a formal process agreed (there are implications for individual Councillors and the Executive Committee as well as for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee).

ACTION: Members to consider the implications of Councillor Calls for Action for the Overview and Scrutiny process.

27. Joint Scrutiny

The Council may need to review joint scrutiny arrangements once the current flooding scrutiny exercise is completed. The Redditch Borough Council representative for this exercise could be invited to contribute to this discussion.

ACTION: To review joint scrutiny arrangements upon the completion of the Worcestershire flooding exercise.

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