

REDDITCH BOROUGH COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

8th December 2010

REVIEW INTO PUBLIC SPEAKING AT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY MEETINGS

Relevant Portfolio Holder	Councillor Carole Gandy, Portfolio Holder for Community Leadership and Partnership
Relevant Head of Service	Claire Felton, Head of Legal, Equality and Democratic Services
Non-Key Decision	

1. SUMMARY OF PROPOSALS

This report contains a summary of existing arrangements employed by local authorities across the country to facilitate public participation in the Overview and Scrutiny process. This had previously been identified by the Committee as a facility that needed to be reviewed.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

The Committee is asked to **RESOLVE** that

- 1) the arrangements of other local authorities to facilitate public participation be noted; and**
- 2) particular practices which might be appropriate for adoption by Redditch Borough Council and areas for further research be identified.**

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Promotion of the Overview and Scrutiny process to the public and the Council's partner organisations was identified within the 2009/10 Overview and Scrutiny Annual Report as an area for further work. A subsequent review was undertaken of public participation arrangements for the Overview and Scrutiny processes at other local authorities in order to identify current practice from which the Overview and Scrutiny Committee might consider adopting similar arrangements.
- 3.2 Information was obtained from the following local authorities: Bath and North East Somerset District Council; Bromsgrove District Council; Buckinghamshire County Council; Cambridgeshire County Council; Canterbury City Council; Chorley Borough Council; Cornwall Council; Dover District Council; Fylde Borough Council; Hackney Council; Northampton Borough Council;

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Scarborough Council; South Gloucestershire Council; South Kesteven District Council; and Wychavon District Council.

- 3.3 The local authorities from which the information was obtained were prioritised by an internet search engine for 'Public Speaking at Overview and Scrutiny meetings'. Information was gathered from the relevant website page and, in some cases, through email correspondence with the relevant Scrutiny officer(s). Some local authorities were selected for research for having a known reputation for effectively engaging members of the public in their Overview and Scrutiny process.

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 Information was obtained from the local authorities to answer a number of questions pertaining to public participation at Overview and Scrutiny meetings in order to help identify both common and unique practice: which members of the public can speak? When can members of the public speak? What notice do members of the public need to provide of their intention to speak? For how long can members of the public speak? Where are meetings advertised? Where are meetings held? How has it worked in practice?

4.2 Which members of the public can speak?

Some local authorities were more exact in terms of specifying which members of the public could speak at their meetings. Whilst some local authorities (e.g. Dover District Council) specified that 'anyone who lives or works in the Dover District Council administrative area, including Town / Parish Councillors and County Councillors' could speak at their Overview and Scrutiny meetings, others were less specific (e.g. South Kesteven District Council) and merely stated that 'any member of the public can speak'. The most common requirement was for the member of public to be a 'resident' of the particular area.

4.3 For how long can members of the public speak?

Many of the local authorities researched impose a time restriction for public speaking at their meetings. In particular, members of the public are usually restricted to three minutes per item. A maximum time allocation for public speaking within a particular meeting is also in existence (e.g. thirty minutes at Dover District Council). Alternatively, local authorities impose restrictions on the number of public questions at a particular meeting (e.g. six questions at

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Wychavon District Council); or alternatively within a particular year (e.g. a maximum of two questions per financial year at Cornwall Council).

Conversely, some local authorities impose few limits on public speaking. For example, at Hackney Council, the length of the public speaking session and the number of questions that can be asked is entirely at the discretion of the Chair and dependent upon the length of the agenda. Also, at Fylde Borough Council, the Chair may extend the time allocated for Public Platform if he considers that doing so would assist the Committee in its deliberations.

4.4 How much notice do members of the public need to provide of their intention to speak?

A number of the local authorities require members of the public to provide advanced written notice to Officers of their intention to speak at a future meeting. For example, members of the public are required to provide written notice either two full working days before the meeting (e.g. Bath and North East Somerset District Council and Chorley Borough Council) or by no later than 10.00am on the Friday preceding the meeting (e.g. Buckinghamshire County Council).

However, other local authorities do not require members of the public to formally register their intention to speak in advance of a particular meeting. However, these local authorities do advise members of the public to contact either the Chairman of the relevant Committee (e.g. South Kesteven District Council) or Scrutiny Officer(s) and to complete a Public Address protocol (e.g. Northampton Borough Council) on the day of the meeting.

4.5 Where are the meetings advertised?

All of the local authorities researched advertise their meetings in advance on their website. Meetings are also advertised at one stop shops; local libraries; on notice boards outside Town Halls; within Council magazines or press releases; or at the premises where the meeting is held if away from the Town Hall.

4.6 Where are the meetings held?

Meetings are rarely held away from the Town Hall. On the rare occasions that they are, they would usually be held at review specific locations. For example, at Hackney Council, a recent Overview and Scrutiny Committee meeting was held on a housing estate due to the consideration of resident participation on

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the agenda. Also at Hackney Council, a recent Health Scrutiny meeting was held at a meeting room at the local hospital.

Similarly, the Enterprise and Economic Development Panel at Bath and North East Somerset District Council recently held a meeting about the future of the Cadbury factory site in Keynsham as this was an affected area.

4.7 How often do members of the public engage in the Overview and Scrutiny process?

Of those local authorities contacted, the general message was that members of the public rarely engage in the Overview and Scrutiny process, despite the commitment to advertising meetings in the public domain.

However, there were occasions when the Overview and Scrutiny process attracted public participation. For example, at Dover District Council, a rail operator pulled out of attending one of the neighbourhood forums (a joint county and district area forum) with little notice. One of the Councillors on the forum raised the issue with their outward facing Scrutiny Committees and the rail operator was asked by the scrutiny Officer to come speak to the Committee. Following press attention three people registered to speak on the issue.

Also, at Bath and North East Somerset District Council's recent Children and Young People Overview and Scrutiny Panel an issue on 'redesigning youth services' was on the agenda. This issue was picked up by the press which prompted a lot of interest from the public. Approximately 80, mainly young people, were in attendance with 5-6 public speakers.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

There are very minimal financial implications expected for adopting the public participation practices employed at other local authorities. It is thought that any costs would result from holding a meeting at an external venue. (This could all be met from existing budgets).

6. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

There are no expected implications.

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7. POLICY IMPLICATIONS

This relates to working practices and procedures that do not require Full Council approval.

8. COUNCIL OBJECTIVES

Working with members of the public to ensure that their views are heard within the Council's policy process corresponds with the Council's aim to be a well managed organisation.

9. RISK MANAGEMENT INCLUDING HEALTH & SAFETY CONSIDERATIONS

There are no risk management implications.

10. CUSTOMER IMPLICATIONS

It is expected that the implementation of any measure to help increase public participation in the Overview and Scrutiny process would improve customer relations.

11. EQUALITIES AND DIVERSITY IMPLICATIONS

T There are no expected equality and diversity implications.

12. VALUE FOR MONEY IMPLICATIONS, PROCUREMENT AND ASSET MANAGEMENT

There are no expected value for money, procurement of asset management implications.

13. CLIMATE CHANGE, CARBON IMPLICATIONS AND BIODIVERSITY

There are no expected climate change, carbon management or biodiversity implications.

14. HUMAN RESOURCES IMPLICATIONS

There are no expected human resources implications.

15. GOVERNANCE/PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS

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Minimal extra work might be expected from Committee Services for facilitating public speaking requests. However, this support is already provided when residents elect to speak at Overview and Scrutiny Committee meetings.

16. COMMUNITY SAFETY IMPLICATIONS INCLUDING SECTION 17 OF CRIME AND DISORDER ACT 1998

There are no expected community safety implications.

17. HEALTH INEQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

There are no expected implications for health inequalities.

18. LESSONS LEARNT

Lessons have been learnt from this authority's experience and from benchmarking comparisons.

19. COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDER ENGAGEMENT

There has been no community or stakeholder engagement in the production of the report.

20. OTHERS CONSULTED ON THE REPORT

Portfolio Holder	No
Chief Executive	No
Executive Director (S151 Officer)	No
Executive Director – Leisure, Cultural, Environmental and Community Services	No
Executive Director – Planning & Regeneration, Regulatory and Housing Services	No
Director of Policy, Performance and Partnerships	No
Head of Service	No

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Head of Resources	No
Head of Legal, Equalities & Democratic Services	No
Corporate Procurement Team	No

21. WARDS AFFECTED

'All Wards'.

22. APPENDICES

There are no appendices.

23. BACKGROUND PAPERS

There are no background papers

24. KEY

Not applicable

AUTHOR OF REPORT

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