

Public Agenda

Minutes of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12 July 2016

Present:

Councillor C.A. Davis (Chairman)
Councillor S.C. Mooney (Vice-Chairman)

Councillors:

S. Capes	M.P.C. Francis	O. Rybinski
S.M. Doran	N. Islam	B.B. Spoor
K. Flurry	J.G. Kavanagh	

Apologies: Councillors R.O. Barratt, S.J. Burkmar and R.A. Smith-Ainsley

159/16 Minutes

The minutes of the meeting held on 19 May 2016 were approved as a correct record.

160/16 Disclosures of Interest

There were none.

161/16 Call-in of Cabinet decisions

No Cabinet decisions had been called in.

162/16 The role of Overview and Scrutiny

Ann Reeder, an expert advisor and regional advocate for the South of England with the Centre for Public Scrutiny facilitated a training session on the role of Overview and Scrutiny. The session gave an outline of what Overview and Scrutiny is, how it works and what it can achieve.

The Committee discussed and identified topics it would like to consider for inclusion in its work programme for the coming year.

Members raised concerns referred to them by local residents concerning the actions of a private car park in Ashford which was deterring people from shopping in the high street. The Chairman noted that he was also aware of parking issues in Stanwell caused by its proximity to Heathrow airport. He proposed that the Committee as a whole undertake an assessment of parking

amenities, both public and privately run in Ashford and Stanwell, and consider any changes that may be required.

Members reported that residents were not aware of what the Council was doing and suggested that a task group be set up to look at the Council's Communications Strategy and the activities that the Council needed to promote.

Members also felt that the parks' bylaws and the management of open spaces generally were in need of review. The Chairman proposed that a task group be set up to look at these matters.

The Committee agreed to set up two Task Groups: to review the Council's Communications Strategy, to include Councillors Capes (Lead member), Doran, Islam and Mooney and to review the parks and open spaces bylaws and management of open spaces, to include Councillors Francis (Lead member), Islam and Spoor.

The Chairman advised that he had received a number of complaints from taxi drivers about the provision of taxi ranks in the Borough and how this provision impacts on the economic needs of the Borough. Taxi drivers had also queried whether they were getting value for money from the Council's charges.

The Committee agreed to review the Council's Taxi Licensing Policy, with particular regard to provision of taxi ranks, whether the economic needs of the borough are adequately served by the present regime and whether the present fees charged represent value for money.

Members also raised issues in relation to economic matters which the Chairman agreed the Economic Development Task Group would be happy to look at, and highways matters which needed to be referred to Surrey County Council's Local Committee in Spelthorne.

Resolved to:

1. include in the Committee's work programme for 2016-2017:
 - (a) An assessment of parking amenities, both public and privately run in Ashford and Stanwell, and consider any changes that may be required; and
 - (b) A review of the Council's Taxi Licensing Policy, with particular regard to provision of taxi ranks, whether the economic needs of the borough are adequately served by the present regime and whether the present fees charged represent value for money; and
2. set up Task Groups to review:
 - (a) the Council's Communications Strategy, comprising Councillors Capes, (Lead member), Doran, Islam and Mooney; and
 - (b) parks and open spaces bylaws and management of open spaces, comprising Councillors Francis (Lead member), Islam and Spoor.

163/16 Provisional Revenue Outturn 2015/16

The Committee received the report on the provisional revenue outturn for 2015/16 and noted that £13.925m had been spent against the full year revised budget of £14.536m. Taking into account the use of carry forwards, investment income, reduced use of reserves and business rates retention the net underspend was approximately £261k. Carry forward requests for 2016-2017 amounting to £96k would be accommodated from the underspend.

Resolved to note the provisional revenue outturn for 2015/2016.

164/16 Provisional Capital Outturn 2015/16

The Committee received the provisional capital outturn for 2015/16. It noted that £1.599m had been spent against the revised budget.

Due to rescheduling of some schemes to 2016/17, there would be an under spend for the 2015/16 financial year of £611k of which £522k had been requested as carry forwards to 2016/17.

Resolved to note the provisional capital outturn for 2015/2016.

165/16 Treasury Management - Annual report

The Committee received the Treasury Management Annual Report on treasury performance for 2015/16, covering the council's activities in the borrowing and investment market and the associated monitoring and control of risk.

The Committee discussed some concerns about all the financial reports being received at this meeting, with the Cabinet member for Finance, Councillor Howard Williams and the Principal Accountant.

Members asked whether the information provided could be made clearer for the ordinary reader as they were concerned that the wording and content of all the financial reports was too complex to understand in its current form.

Members also asked the purpose of reports before them and whether it was necessary to receive all the reports on the same agenda.

The Principal Accountant explained that the Council's budget was complex as it covered many services, and in consequence the reports were quite broad ranging and detailed.

The purpose of the reports was to provide feedback to councillors on how the Council's income and expenditure did in the last complete financial year compared to what we predicted in the budgets. He said that it was important that feedback was provided on both revenue (i.e. day to day spending on

services covering employees, supplies and services, fees and charges etc.) and capital (i.e. expenditure on items which will provide benefits to the Council beyond one year). Treasury Management was reported separately because of its key contribution in supporting the revenue budget.

The reports provided at subsequent meetings in the year would focus on how income and expenditure at each quarter was doing against the budget. The frequency of the monitoring reports had reduced in recent years (although the Council was required by accounting standards to provide at least a half yearly monitoring report and an outturn report on Treasury Management).

The Principal Accountant advised that Accountancy was always looking to improve the simplicity and usefulness of its reports to councillors and was open to make further improvements so that the reports were easier to read. Councillor Williams offered to run a short training session for all councillors to help them understand these reports.

Resolved to:

1. note the Treasury Management annual report for 2015/16; and
2. invite Councillor Williams and the Council's finance team to run a short training session on finance terminology and reading accounts for all members and strongly recommend that all members attend.

166/16 Corporate Project Management progress report

The Committee received an update report on progress with the Council's key projects and the Towards a Sustainable Future (TaSF) programme. The report noted that as the Council's focus and priorities had changed towards property acquisitions and housing, some of the previous priority/flagship projects had either been put on hold, delayed or had closed early. Further details of the progress made in each area were outlined in the report and appendices.

Resolved to note the progress report on:

1. the Towards a Sustainable Future programme and work stream updates
2. Corporate Projects; and
3. the work the Corporate Project Team was undertaking to promote good practice and support project managers and sponsors.



The role of Overview and Scrutiny

Spelthorne Borough Council
Tuesday 12 July 2016
Ann Reeder

Centre for Public Scrutiny

- National charity
- Focused on scrutiny, accountability and good governance in public sector
- And amongst those who deliver publicly-funded services
- Policy and practice in governance, scrutiny and accountability

“I want to argue that there is a perfectly respectable alternative career in public life and it is that of holding powerful people to account.”
Jeremy Paxman
at a CfPS conference



Programme

- Introductions
- Outline of O&S origins, principles and powers
- Ways of working and tools for O&S
- Group task on planning and prioritising reviews, facilitated by the Chairman

Discussions, tips, good practice and activities throughout



Session 1

Origins, principles and powers

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Outline of O&S in law

- Local Government Act 2000
- Health and Social Care Act 2001
- Police and Justice Act 2006
- Local Government and Public Involvement in Health Act 2007
- Police Reform and Social Responsibility Act 2011
- Localism Act 2011
- Health and Social Care Act 2012
- Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2015



*“O&S committees can look at **anything** relating to the wellbeing of its residents”*

Outline of O&S powers

- Can require information ...
- ... attendance
- ... and reasoned response
- Powers over certain partners; more limited over others
- More formal powers with 'social care authorities' eg health statutory consultee
- Often more about **influence, persuasion and goodwill**
- Some items are excluded eg those with separate complaints and appeal processes, planning and licensing applications



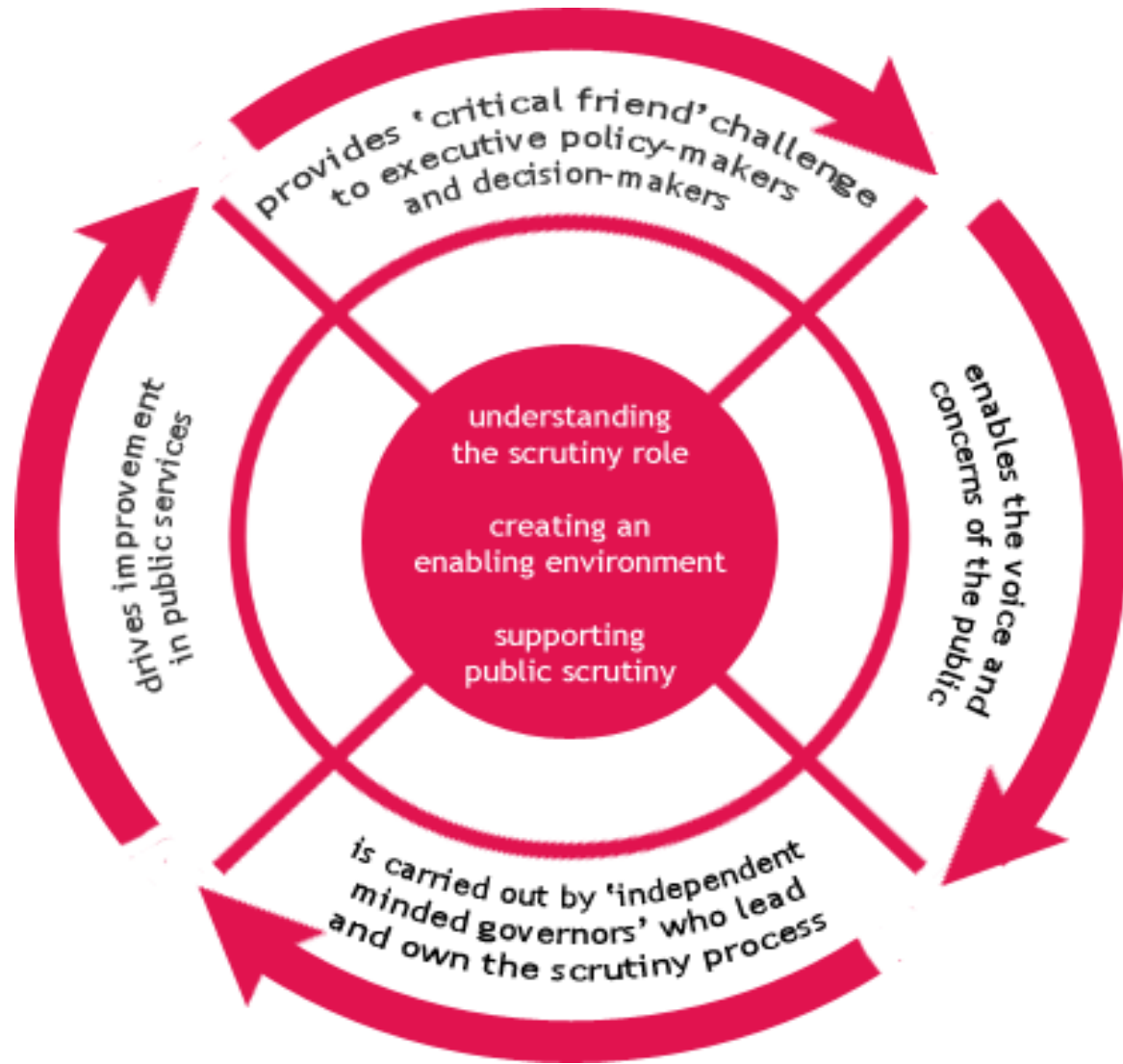
O&S context

- The financial challenge of austerity; declining resources
- Public sector reforms
- The pressure to innovate
- Francis, Jay and Casey reports
- The devolution agenda
- ... opportunities for a new relevance during major change
- Return on investment significant

“Councillors have a vital duty to scrutinise and challenge their council's use of public money. This duty to local council taxpayers is at the heart of their role and mandate as local elected representatives.”



Key principles and conditions for effective O&S



O&S activity – some suggestions

- Member led process, not only committee
- Strategic oversight of plans and policies
- Critical Friend constructive challenge
- Monitoring of performance
- Review of outcomes and impact
- Input to policy development
- Independent view on future challenges
- ... Of Council and partners
- A means to connect with residents



O&S in Spelthorne

See Procedure Rules; Agenda Item 5; pp 9 -16

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

- Pre-scrutiny eg with regard to the Cabinet Forward Plan
- Policy development, providing input to shaping decisions and offering options
- Review eg regular corporate project management update and financial monitoring by exception
- Special projects and new initiatives, eg devolution, as required
- Option for infrequent Call-in

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“Fundamentally, good scrutiny requires everyone in the council to understand what scrutiny is actually for. It’s more and more necessary for scrutiny to have a clear place in the organisation’s approach to change, service improvement and policy making”
LGA



Reflections on O&S

Have a conversation around:

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Your O&S experience:

- What it is for
- How it can help

Session 2

Ways of working and tools for O&S



O&S key tasks

See Procedure Rules; Agenda Item 5; pp 9 -16

- Work programming
- Project scoping
- Evidence gathering
- Questioning and listening
- Report writing
- Presenting recommendations
- Decision tracking and follow up
- Evaluation
- Other?

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O&S processes

- Planning O&S activity
- Desk research and briefings offline
- Lead Member, Officer and Partner accountability in person and reports
- Viewing at first hand, and other user and community consultation
- Q&A with expert witnesses
- Monitoring of scrutiny topics and activity
- Other?



O&S challenges

- Have manageable work programmes
- Have realistic agendas
- Manage large volumes of information
- Ensure appropriate timescales
- Make judgments regarding:
 - complexity of issue
 - available resources
 - potential outcomes
 - value to the Council
 - return on investment

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Work programming

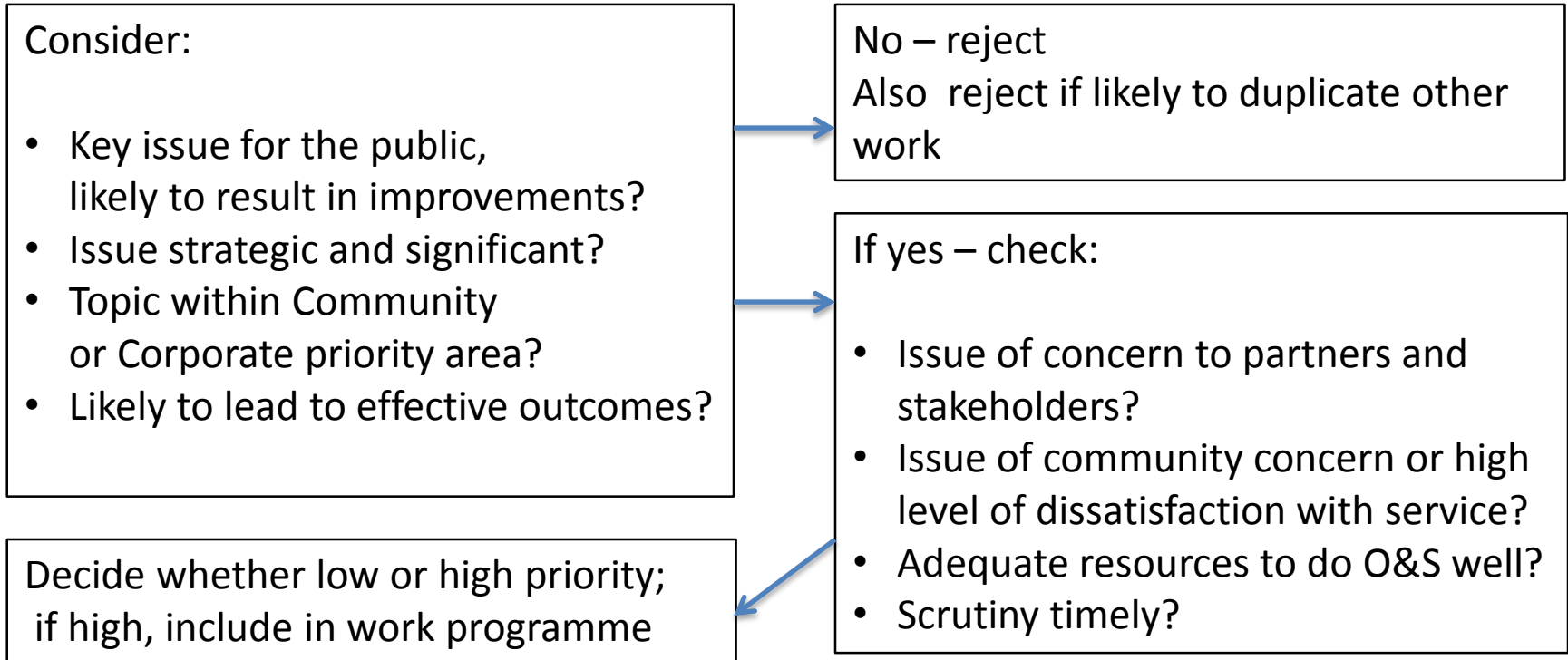
- Has a corporate fit
- Is developed with stakeholders
- Uses clear rationale and criteria
- Follows a realistic timetable
- Is timely
- Appreciates available capacity
- Understands that 'less is more'
- Targets limited resources well



Work Programme Development

Overview and Scrutiny Topic Selection Flowchart; adapted from South East Employers

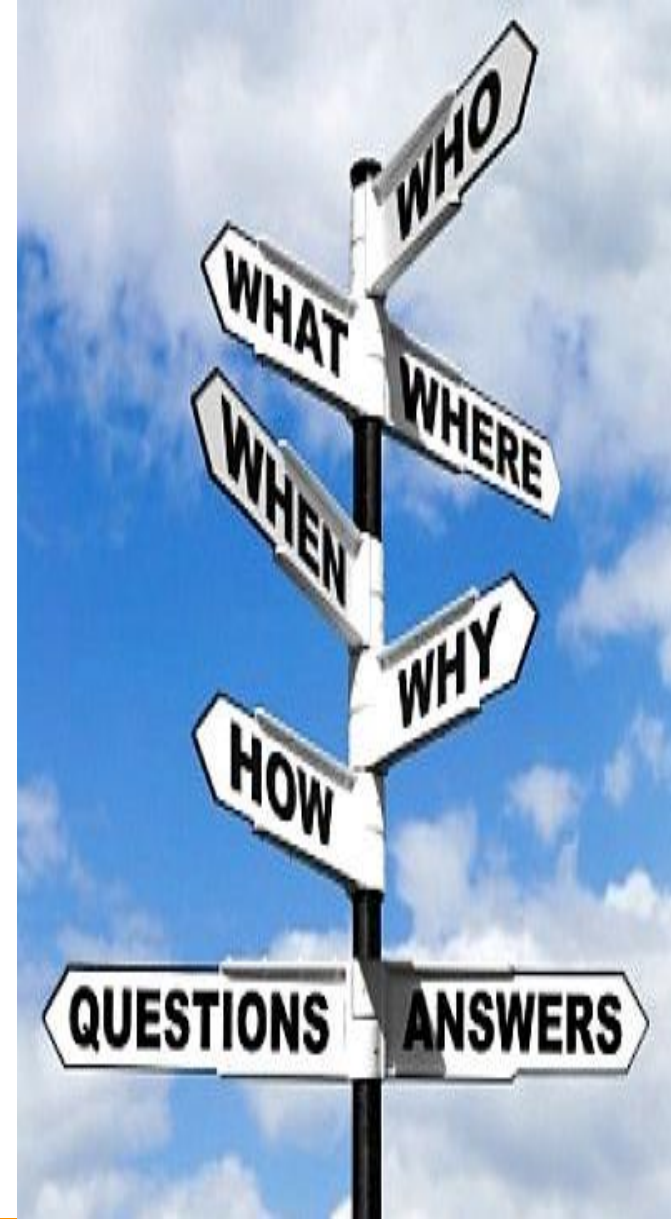
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Project scoping

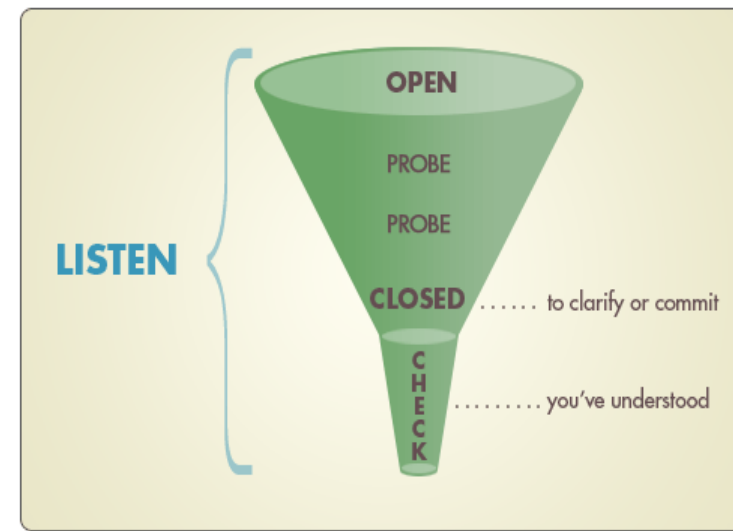
To ensure a structured review, scope:

- Objective(s)
- Terms of reference
- Intended outcomes
- Methodology
- Inputs for evidence gathering
- Timescales
- Intended recipient of timely, clear and robust outcomes



Evidence and reports

- Where from? What and how?
Written, site visits, commissioned research, comparative data, verbal
- Plan a questioning strategy
- Use Key Lines of Enquiry
- Evaluate evidence
- Draw evidence-based conclusions
- Draft SMART recommendations
- Submit it to decision makers



Decision tracking and follow up

- Submit reports and recommendations to appropriate body
- Seek response to or decision within timescale
- Evaluate response
- Consider if evaluation suggests further O&S action
- Monitor progress with recommendations and actions
- Evaluate each review:
 - Resources used
 - Impact made
 - Outcomes delivered against Council priorities





Session 3

Group task - selecting potential O&S topics

Group task

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**Planning the O&S
work programme**
Focus on community impact
and support for Corporate Priorities



Evaluation

Please complete the evaluation form

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