

# **Report to Overview & Scrutiny Task & Finish Panel**

**Date of meeting: 20 May 2013**



**Subject: Overview & Scrutiny (OS) – Public Profile**

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## **Recommendations:**

**(1) To consider the question of the public profile of OS and how it should engage with the public; and**

**(2) To consider whether public questions should be introduced at the OS Committee and the way in which they should operate including whether questions at Panel meetings should also be allowed.**

## **Report:**

1. This report sets out the legal and constitutional background to the public profile of OS, including points which arose during consultation, details of any previous reviews conducted and comments made at the initial scoping meeting.

## **Legal Requirements**

2. Overview and Scrutiny Committees (and sub-committees) may invite other persons to attend must meet in public except where appropriate provisions allow the public to be excluded.

## **Constitution**

3. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee may go on site visits, conduct public surveys, hold public meetings, commission research and do all other things that they consider necessary to inform their deliberations and may pay reasonable fees and expenses.

4. Where the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Panels asks people to attend meetings to give evidence it must conduct meetings in accordance with the following principles:

- a) investigation to be conducted fairly and all members of the committee given the opportunity to ask questions of attendees, and to contribute and speak;
- b) that those assisting the committee by giving evidence be treated with respect and courtesy; and
- c) investigations must be conducted so as to maximise the efficiency of the investigation or analysis.

## **Feedback/Suggestions from Consultation**

5. The OSC has not achieved real public engagement, neglecting their views and their involvement in the scrutiny process.
6. The public should be involved in important issues and call-ins.
7. Public engagement should be encouraged within committees to scrutinise external bodies, combining member and public questions.
8. Venues other than the Civic Offices should be used to increase public participation.
9. OS should keep alert on issues of public interest, using a 'tabloid' approach to encourage this engagement.

## **Previous Reviews**

10. Public involvement in meetings should be encouraged by use of additional publicity.
11. Meetings should be held in the most appropriate internal/external venues including the use of the Committee Rooms (subject to budgetary considerations).
12. In order to facilitate the use of the Committee Rooms at the Civic Offices for public meetings, a DDF bid of £8,000 be approved for improved card access arrangements and improved signage.
13. The Council should use the PICK system for priority setting; public interest: the concerns of local people should influence the issues chosen.
14. There should be a mechanism for requests from members/public to be considered for inclusion within the Forward Work Programme of OS.
15. An annual report of OS should be introduced on the basis of a case study approach and a new OS logo and website/newsletter produced.

## **The Public Addressing O&S**

16. Any member of the public or a representative of an outside organisation may address the Overview and Scrutiny Committee on any agenda item (except those dealt with in private session as exempt or confidential business) due to be considered at any meeting. The following rules apply if such a request is made:

- (a) requests must relate to an existing agenda item;
- (b) requests must not raise new business for the meeting concerned;
- (c) all requests must be notified to the Council before 4pm on the day of the meeting;
- (d) requests accompanied by proposals to circulate written material must be received three working days before the meeting in time to be sent to Overview and Scrutiny Committee members;
- (e) requests are required to be in writing;
- (f) a maximum of two persons shall be permitted to address the Committee at any individual meeting;

- (g) a maximum of six persons shall be permitted to address the Committee at any individual meeting;
- (h) each speaker as a maximum of three minutes during the meeting;
- (i) the Overview and Scrutiny Committee shall be able to ask questions on any comments made;
- (j) if there are more than six requests to the Committee, they will be prioritised by reference to date of receipt unless the Leader of Council feels that there are special circumstances that dictate an alternative approach.

#### **Other Matters – Public Questions**

15. The Panel has previously discussed whether there should be public questions at the OS Committee (and Panels). Currently, a member of the public can address the Committee (but not Panels) subject to various conditions which are set out in paragraph 16 of this report. This is not quite the same as open questions as requests to address the Committee are linked to existing business before the meeting.

16. There are provisions for public questions at both Council and Cabinet meetings and these are subject to rules about the deadline for submitting questions and the content, namely that they should relate to the powers and duties of the Council or matters which affect the District or any part thereof.

17. The Panel may wish to take a view about questions at OS Committee and whether this should be extended to Panels.