

Findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Self-Evaluation Group 2017

This paper summarises the findings of the Overview and Scrutiny Self-Evaluation Group 2017 set out according to the steps identified in the Centre for Public Scrutiny publication 'the scrutiny evaluation framework' and reflects the feedback of the outcome of the group's consultation with an all-member seminar on 8 May 2017. <http://www.cfps.org.uk/scrutiny-self-evaluation-framework/>

Step 1 - basic 'design principles' for overview and scrutiny

CfPS Consideration	Finding
Members leading and owning the work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work programme should be directed and led by overview and scrutiny members • The Chairman and vice-chairman should better engage with the scrutiny officer on the work programme
Flexibility	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Be flexible enough to respond to matters affecting the area • Consider resources • Members 'do' overview and scrutiny, supported by officers
Adding value, outcomes and prioritisation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members should provide and lead on enough topics to warrant prioritisation • Work programme should be aligned to residents' survey priorities • Outcome focussed, and add value

The group noted the importance of design principles as the CfPS framework explained that the design principles would keep the group focussed on the way the function would work in the future, and help the group to 'avoid fixating exclusively on governance structures' (like the number and terms of reference of the bodies that form the function. The group applied a simple RAG status to each finding, and where possible looked forward, rather than back.

CfPS 'characteristics'	Finding
Clearly defined role in improvement and governance arrangements?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a clearly defined role • Has lost direction in recent years
'Inquiries' / reviews methodologically sound	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Need stronger more committed member leadership • Focus on achieving a recommendation to a decision maker • Function can be seen as 'boring'
Member training and development	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preference for 1-1 sessions, advice and assistance • Preference not to have 'bought-in' or generic training
Support from corporate management team	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director is Scrutiny Lead Officer • Consider synchronising work programme with cyclical cabinet items – budget and corporate plan
Councillor led, balanced priorities based on risk and importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny is councillor led • Awareness of work programme could improve • Consider early steer on next corporate plan • Has not been enough items to warrant prioritisation
Meetings and activities well planned and make the best use of resources?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Work programming needs more focus • Work needed on leadership of the function
Decision makers give public account of themselves	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Recognition of the value of the cabinet member interview programme • Continue to refine programme of interviews & asking strategic questions of cabinet member
Effective communication to raise awareness of, and encourage participation in democratic accountability	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Members are a conduit for participation
Operates non-politically and deals effectively with issues, tension and conflict	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-political, little or no tension, any tensions have been well-managed
Build trust and relationships with internal and external stakeholders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reasonable internal relationships have been built • External relationships need further work (and awareness building amongst members)
Enable the voice of local people to be heard as part of the decision making process	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Use residents survey in setting work programme and awareness of local issues affecting residents • Raise awareness that members set the work programme using the suggestion form

Step 2 – role of scrutiny

Is not the role of overview and scrutiny	Is the role of overview and scrutiny
Managing staff	Engaging with Cabinet members about strategy, not management
Using up the council's resources	Recommending how resources could be prioritised better / differently
Managing contracts	Understanding the impact on residents when things aren't going well and make a recommendation to strategically address performance
Duplicating the work of others internally or externally	Understand the work of others, how it fits strategically, respond to any consultations, and make recommendations
Promoting the unilateral view of a single person, member or external group	Have a consensus view on recommendations. Task and finish approach must have a quorum of 3
'Navel gaze'	Have a broad view of all the influential bodies regionally

CfPS 'productive' way of working	Finding
Limiting the number of 'substantive' items and limiting items 'to note'	Less than 10% of overview and scrutiny agenda items were 'substantive' in 2015-17. More substantive items are needed
'Themed' agendas	O&S Committee not themed, but standing bodies themed
Cabinet members answer questions, rather than chief officers	Overview and scrutiny should decide how to operate the interview sessions
Relying on members to read papers, and that all important information is written	Papers may not be read – little awareness of work programme / suggestion form
Chairman empowered to move recommendations at the meeting	O&S <i>only</i> received recommendations from sub-bodies - just 4% of O&S Committee items 2015 /17. No examples of Chairman 'moving recommendations' at a committee 2015/17

CfPS 'Less productive' way of working	Finding	CfPS - what can be done about it?
Too many 'substantive' items on the agenda	Too few substantive items generally	Sharpen work programme, ensure the committee has a role in making recommendations.
Items to note or to provide an update (including updates from yourselves)	Two thirds of overview and scrutiny committee agenda items 2015 – 17 were updates to note	The outcome should be the making of recommendations, not ongoing noting or reviewing.
Provision of full performance management reports/ scorecards to a meeting	Role of finance and performance sub-committee Note: no recommendations have been made consequent to performance information 2015-17	Consider exception reporting. Use data specifically to bring forward recommendations.
Establishment of open ended 'standing bodies'	Business Improvement, Finance and Performance, Social Inclusion, Crime and Disorder	'Raises resource challenges and means that such scrutiny work risks not being especially task orientated'
Work that adopts only a council focused perspective of the local community 'navel gazing'	Social inclusion outward looking. Other bodies council focussed	Be more strategic, look outward and across providers. Lack of overall focus leads to silo working.

Step 4 - characteristics for 2017/18

'as is - 2016/17'	'to be - 2018/19'
A reactive function	A proactive function
Few members put forward work programme items	Members are urged to put forward work programme items
Work programme doesn't seem 'strategic' or policy focused	Work programme will be more 'strategic' and influence policy
Limited 'horizon scanning' of external matters that O&S function could influence	Greater 'horizon scanning' of external matters that O&S function could influence – responding to consultations for example
Finance and performance information has not led to recommendations	Finance and performance information does lead to recommendations
Task and finish approach is infrequent and slow	Task and finish approach is more frequent and fast

Step 4 considering structural models for 2017/18

Structural models at a glance

12 sample districts (and model)

Arun (B), Crawley (A/B); Guildford (B), Chichester (B), Tunbridge Wells (B), Mid Sussex (E), Wealden (A/B), Sevenoaks (B), Lewes (A/B), Reigate and Banstead (A/B/F) (with 1 budget task & finish panel & 1 standing panel, Tandridge (Committee system) (A), Mole Valley (B) (calls task and finish groups 'panels').

All councils in sample have equivalent of cabinet member interview session and undertake crime and disorder scrutiny at O&S Committee, not in a separate 'body' (check MV)

Analysis of models in self-evaluation framework

Model	Strengths	Weaknesses	Opportunities	Threats
A One committee that undertakes all work (without task and finish groups or standing bodies)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Committee is very productive as carries out function directly, without a sub-architecture 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No (or very few) task and finish reviews, members not likely to undertake in-depth work May limit the skills development of members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers a visibly strong, undiluted function An opportunity for a very strong chairman to direct function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> That task and finish review work does not come forward Members may not like change
B One committee which commissions work from task and finish groups and no standing sub bodies	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Most common model in sample districts Most likely to achieve CfPS productive outcomes Allows for the most Task and Finish Chairmen per year Works well with Advisory arrangements Is flexible and responsive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of 'prestige' of 'task and finish group' title 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Offers a visibly strong, less diluted function Each T&F Chairman owns and leads a review to completion Most likely to be influential Task and Finish Chairmen could be given an SRA An opportunity for a very strong chairman to direct function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members may not like change Ask IRP to consider SRA for T&F chairmen in absence of sub-bodies
C Two committees 'internal' and 'external'	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for 2 chairmen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No districts in sample have this CfPS state not an effective way to divide up work Creates narrowed, not strategic focus 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not allow for a strategic approach Falsely forces each matter to be either internal or external Had existed in some councils but superseded by other models
D Two committees 'overview' and 'scrutiny'; dividing policy development from performance management and call-in	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for 2 chairmen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Does not sit well in councils with Advisory arrangements (policy side) 1 chairman must fulfil legislative role Have to create a way to divide by definition 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Had existed in some councils but superseded by other models May be more adversarial
E Three or more committees; terms of reference divided in a variety of ways, often aligned to corporate priorities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for multiple chairmen 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Not likely to leave capacity for task and finish approach at districts Does not operate in models with Advisory arrangements 1 chairman must fulfil legislative role Internal focus, limiting external engagement 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Models existed at districts before 2011, more likely at very large councils (Cornwall: 124 members). Potentially drains capacity / energy for any task and finish work Internal focus, limiting external engagement
F Horsham model: One committee with 4 standing sub-committees and ad hoc task and finish	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Allows for 5 'chairmen' positions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Task and finish have a long route back to the O&S committee with any recommendations Has lacked focus, overview and scrutiny committee is unproductive Missed opportunities – corporate plan / budget setting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> An opportunity for a very strong chairman to direct function 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> High proportion of unproductive characteristics at O&S committee Diluted function

Step 4 – self-evaluation group propose structural change for 2017/18

2016/17 'as is'	2017/18 'to be'
One Overview and Scrutiny Committee	One Overview and Scrutiny Committee
Four Standing Sub-Committees	That no 'standing bodies', howsoever styled, shall be formed.
Ad-hoc task and finish groups	The Overview and Scrutiny Committee will commission and appoint no more than three 'task and finish groups' to operate at any one time