



## **EMPLOYEE GUIDE TO OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY**

### **Your Role in Overview and Scrutiny – What is expected of you?**

Overview and Scrutiny is the main way by which Cabinet is held to account in public. As well as scrutinising individual decisions, scrutiny has an important role in reviewing Council policies and making recommendations, to the Cabinet or full Council, on future policy options. It can also review the discharge of non-Executive functions and reports on matters of more general concern. This summary guide provides you with a snapshot of the various ways in which you might get involved in Overview and Scrutiny.

These are:

- Overview and Scrutiny
- Call-in
- Preparation information for overview scrutiny members i.e. preparing a briefing note or Committee report
- Getting involved in a detailed review

The Overview and Scrutiny function is supported by an Overview and Scrutiny Officer who provide advice and support to Councillors to undertake their work. This includes research, analysing data and report preparation.

Northampton's Overview Scrutiny Structure is:

- One Overview and Scrutiny Committee and three standing Scrutiny Panels
- The Scrutiny Panels carry out wide ranging Reviews
- The Overview and Scrutiny Committee co-ordinates and manages the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Panels.

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The Committee comprises fifteen Councillors three of which will normally be the Chairs and the three Scrutiny Panels. The Committee has the following responsibilities:-

- Co-ordinating work programmes
  - Allocation of resources
  - Allocating areas of responsibility in cases of doubt
  - Re-allocation of areas of responsibility in the event of changes in Cabinet portfolios
  - Involvement of other people in the Overview and Scrutiny process
- The Scrutiny Panels carry out time limited strategic and operational reviews.
  - All non-executive Councillors are given the opportunity to be involved in the reviews by putting themselves forward to join the Scrutiny Panels throughout the year to review issues of interest and importance and inform critical policy development.

## Call-in

When a decision is made by the Cabinet collectively, any Councillor may call in that decision for the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to consider. This is subject to the 'urgency' provisions set out in the Council's Constitution. The power of call in does not apply to the day to day management and operational decisions made by employees under delegated powers and may only be exercised in relation to non-key decisions as part of a review of service plans or during the best value process.

Employees should therefore build an implementation buffer into their project plan just in case the decision that they are involved in progressing is called in. The Overview and Scrutiny Call-in Protocol sets out the procedure and guidance notes.

## Preparing information for Scrutiny Councillors i.e. preparing a Committee report

Employees may be asked to attend a meeting of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee or Scrutiny Panel to ensure that Overview and Scrutiny Councillors have an understanding of the

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issue of service area to be scrutinised including; aims and objectives, how they might be developed, the practicalities of service delivery and issues and problems facing the Council.

This may involve preparing a report and/or providing information and advice on:

- existing policies and practices;
- recent committee reports/decisions;
- legislative requirements upon the Council;
- demand v supply/Recovery Plan/Community Plan targets; and
- limiting factors on performance.

### **Getting involved in a detailed review (Scrutiny Panels)**

For more detailed investigations Scrutiny Panels are established to consider specific topics in detail over a specified period of time. The Scrutiny Panels are made up of small number of Councillors and often co-opted members who analyse and assess a specific Council or another organisations activities and processes, with a view to making improvements.

Overview and Scrutiny is not about undertaking a witch-hunt it is about working with the Cabinet and employees to improve Council services. Overview and Scrutiny Councillors will aim to adopt a non-adversarial approach and to work with employees to identify improvements.

When both a Cabinet Member and senior officers are summoned to appear before the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, or are invited to make a contribution to proceedings, each shall contribute within the scope of the normal boundaries of the officer and Member roles, at the direction of the Chair.

Normally the Reviews that are carried out by the Scrutiny Panels take no longer than six months. Meeting frequency is around six weekly. Where appropriate, off-site venues will be used for the meetings where doing so will give Members greater awareness/engagement with local communities.

**It is worth noting** that Councillors are entitled to information in accordance with their rights as a Councillor. These rights are

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specified in the Council's code of conduct. Employees have a duty to provide information in accordance with the advice, to all Councillors irrespective of their status and political party. Requests for information that do not meet the criteria set out in the code of conduct should, in the first instance, be referred to your line manager, and where the matter cannot be resolved, to the Council's Monitoring Officer. Under no circumstances should they be ignored.

## **Further Information**

This summary guide provides a brief introduction, which I hope you find useful. Please do not hesitate to contact the Overview and Scrutiny Officer who will be happy to help:

## **Overview and Scrutiny Officer**

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