

Overview & Scrutiny Committee

SCRUTINY
NEWSLETTER

ISSUE 6 SUMMER 2008

word from

Chair of the management overview and
scrutiny committee

introduction

Welcome to the September 2008 edition of the Overview and Scrutiny Newsletter. This is our sixth edition and we want to update you on current issues surrounding the Council's Overview and Scrutiny function. Northampton Borough Council has three Overview and Scrutiny Committees, which perform an Overview and Scrutiny function in regards to partnership, regeneration, community safety and community development, housing & environment, improvement and performance. The overarching Overview and Scrutiny Committee consists of the three committees.

Evaluation of OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY 2012



NORTHAMPTON
BOROUGH COUNCIL

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Foreword

Following on from the evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny that was undertaken in 2008, Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton has been noted for a number of its processes and procedures as best practice. It was felt that there was a need for a further evaluation to be carried out in 2012 to set the basis for the production of an Excellence Plan for Overview and Scrutiny.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS)'s self-evaluation framework "Accountability works for you" was used to gather the majority of the relevant information. It is designed to be proportionate, relevant and focus on culture and attitudes, rather than process. It is based on robust evidence about the way that accountability, transparency and involvement should work in public services, and is sufficiently flexible to apply to any body delivering a public service.

The framework led us through some straightforward steps, posing questions that were aimed to help us and the peer reviewers to tease out some of the most significant challenges, and focus on achievable ways to further develop.

Questions from the framework were completed by the Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, together with the Scrutiny Officer. Strengths and achievements were highlighted, as were some priorities for development planning.

As part of the evaluation process, the Scrutiny Teams of two Local Authorities (Rugby Borough Council and Broxtowe Borough Council) undertook separate Peer Reviews of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council. Both recognised the many strengths of the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton and also suggested some areas which could be developed.

A number of Councillors also completed a short questionnaire about the Overview and Scrutiny process, the results are contained within the report.

A comparison of Northampton Borough Council's Scrutiny Review process was carried out with three other Authorities who had either won or been shortlisted for a CfPS Good Scrutiny Award 2012.

I would like to thank all those people acknowledged below who gave up their time and contributed to this important Review that will lead to the production of an Excellence Plan for Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton.



Councillor Les Marriott
Chair, Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Acknowledgements to all those who took part in the Review: -

- Councillor Matt Lynch, Deputy Chair, who provided information for inclusion in the self-evaluation form
- Councillors for taking the time to complete the short questionnaire and for meeting with the peer reviewers
- Paul Ansell and Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officers, Rugby Borough Council for carrying out a peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton
- Councillors Jane Patrick and Brian Wombell and Jeremy Ward, Scrutiny Officer, Broxtowe Borough Council for carrying out a peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 In 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee instructed the Overview and Scrutiny Team to undertake an evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council (NBC) using the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) self-evaluation framework. The findings from the self-evaluation were used as the basis of developing an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 It was agreed that the self-evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) function at Northampton be repeated in 2012, the aim of which is to produce an Excellence Plan for O&S building upon the good practice that has been previously recognised.
- 1.3 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to provide a mechanism for Scrutiny Members to:
 - Demonstrate the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton
 - To identify areas and means for further developing Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council
 - To provide objectivity by identifying evidence from the questions posed in the framework
 - To highlight any potential barriers to improvement
- 1.4 A significant amount of evidence gathered from various sources, details of which are contained in the report:-
- 1.5 The Chair and Vice Chair of the of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee completed the self-evaluation framework form based on the following key areas:
 - Work Programme
 - Work of the Panels/Evidence gathering
 - Outcomes and Impact
 - Accountability role
- 1.6 Councillors were sent a short questionnaire, comprising six main questions regarding the Overview and Scrutiny process at NBC.

- 1.7 The Scrutiny Teams of two Local Authorities were approached regarding undertaking a peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny Function at Northampton Borough Council. The Scrutiny Officer and two Scrutiny Chairs, Broxtowe Borough Council and the Scrutiny Officers, Rugby Borough Council, undertook separate peer reviews
- 1.8 The Overview and Scrutiny Officer, NBC, carried out a comparison of Northampton Borough Council's Scrutiny function with that of other districts as suggested by the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS). The CfPS directed the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to the Good Scrutiny Award Winners and a sample of shortlisted nominations for 2012.

KEY FINDINGS

- 2 After all the evidence was gathered, the following key findings in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton were drawn: -

2.1 CfPS's Accountability Works for You" Framework

2.1.1 Achievements:-

- Good relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.
- Overview and Scrutiny has a vigorous monitoring work programme. It ensures all accepted recommendations are implemented before the report is signed off from the monitoring work programme.
- Cabinet Members attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings, as appropriate, and provide feedback to Overview and Scrutiny when monitoring the accepted recommendations in its Review reports takes place via the formal monitoring process.
- The call-in procedure is used sparingly.
- Scrutiny Panels are non-partisan and focus on the issue being reviewed. They are working effectively with some good issue-based Reviews.

- There are examples where changes for the public have been made as a result of the work of O&S.
- Overview and Scrutiny sets its own work programme and involves Cabinet and the public in influencing suggestions.
- Good working relationship with partners and key Agencies and O&S makes good use of external witnesses and experts.
- Good scrutiny performance monitoring which has led to recommendations being made.
- Comprehensive O&S webpage (www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)
- Public attendance and speaking is welcomed at every Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panel meeting.
- There has been good press coverage of Scrutiny at Northampton, including promotion of an invitation to suggest a potential review, the work programme and the innovative Paperless Committees Trial.
- Aspects of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton continue to be noted as best practice.
- Scrutiny is generally of a consensus nature and it is rare for a vote to be used.

2.1.2 Challenges:-

- On occasions, during early evidence gathering, the Panel may go outside its scope but the compilation of the core questions to be put to key witnesses brings focus back.
- On occasions, specialist Officers may provide too much direction into the scope of the Review.
- More use of the pre-decision scrutiny role.

2.1.3 Suggested changes:-

- The Leader of the Council should be invited to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, mid-year, to provide an update on Cabinet's priorities, this will follow on from Cabinet's attendance at the annual Work Programme event. This will assist in strengthening the pre-decision scrutiny process.
- Upon publication of the Executive Business List, The Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Chair of O&S, contacts all members of the O&S Committee asking them to forward any items that it feels would warrant pre-decision scrutiny.
- The evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny continues to be carried out every two years.

- An Excellence Plan for Overview and Scrutiny to be introduced following the evaluation.

2.2 Peer Review – Rugby Borough Council

2.2.1 Achievements

- The three-panel arrangement is working better than the former arrangement.
- There is evidence that all non-executive members are able to be directly involved in Overview and Scrutiny work and that many are engaged in a positive way.
- There is cross-party working with no whips.
- Extensive use of external witnesses with robust and effective questioning.
- Panel meetings' work is planned by the chairman and vice-chairman, who both meet with the Scrutiny Officer.
- Having vice-chairmen is seen as a positive way of avoiding too much onus being placed on the chairman to steer the panel.
- There is a constructive relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet and that Cabinet members help to inform the development of the work programme.
- There is some evidence of influencing decisions before they are made by Cabinet (the Independent Living review being an example of this).
- Good budget scrutiny process.
- The Scrutiny officers were impressed by the paperless Committees' initiative being piloted by overview and scrutiny and the positive way in which members are embracing it. This seems to them to reflect the innovative and forward-looking attitude they often encountered during their visit.
- Overview and Scrutiny has moved on considerably since the Scrutiny Officers' visit in 2008, and there have been a number of achievements of which members are justifiably proud.

2.2.2 Challenges:-

- The Reviews are wide-ranging and this means there is a danger of lack of focus.
- Even with the scopes of these reviews being drawn as widely as they are, there is still pressure from some members to stretch their brief even further or to be distracted by side issues. There is, however, evidence that the Scrutiny Officer performs a valuable role in keeping reviews on track.

- New members seem to find the concept of scrutiny hard to grasp at the induction stage.
- More could be done to demonstrate the value and impact of overview and scrutiny review work.
- The Scrutiny Officers found it difficult to form a clear picture of systems and procedures for pre-decision scrutiny and engagement with Cabinet in general. However, we appreciate that this is an aspect of overview and scrutiny that is challenging for all local authorities.

2.2.3 Suggested Changes:-

- The adoption of a clear Action Plan at the end of each Review and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that Plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.
- More robust pre-decision scrutiny processes.

2.3 Peer Review – Broxtowe Borough Council

2.3.1 Achievements:-

- Pre-decision Scrutiny works well.
- Scrutiny adds value to the role of Councillors.
- Scrutiny recognised as independent.
- Wide ranging Reviews.
- It is an education for Councillors on the workings of the Council and partnership working.
- A feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews - Members feel engaged by a review at Northampton.
- The understanding of the source of subjects displays not only knowledge of the system but also engenders a feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews. This is vital if members are to feel engaged by a review. This is displayed here.
- Scrutiny is apolitical.
- Scrutiny is transparent.
- All Reviews work to the same rules and procedures however there is leeway for Chairs to work in different ways.
- No whipping.
- Good guidance is provided by the Scrutiny Officer.
- Members of the public are engaged and encouraged.
- Well organised work programming setting event.

- Positive culture towards scrutiny.
- Excellent standard of Review reports.

Challenges:-

- Confusion amongst members over the role of Scrutiny.
- Some Councillors need a better understanding of the system..
- Questions over whether the most able people were chairs and vice chairs
- Some Members aren't interested.
- Scrutiny needs an equal footing.
- Not all Councillors are clear of the robust monitoring system that Overview and Scrutiny has in place.
- Need to measure outcomes of a Scrutiny Review.

Suggested Changes:-

- Each Scrutiny Panel to be informed of the monitoring process of accepted recommendations contained in Review reports at the scoping meeting.
- The adoption of a clear Action Plan at the end of each Review and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that Plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.

2.4 Scrutiny at Northampton v CfPS good practice scrutiny districts in the way that Reviews are undertaken

2.4.1 Achievements

- Overview and Scrutiny has used innovative methods to conduct reviews previously.
- Good partnership working.
- A number of Reviews have made a real difference.

2.4.2 Challenges:-

- Partners are not normally involved at the scoping stage of a Review.

2.4.3 Suggested Changes:-

- Although O&S at Northampton has previously used the Appreciative Inquiry to conducting a Review, consideration should be given to using this method, as appropriate, for a forthcoming Review, using the 5-D mode.
- For appropriate Reviews, partners should be involved at the scoping stages.

2.5 Member Survey

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent engagement between Overview and Scrutiny and external Agencies • Overview and Scrutiny fulfils its role of holding Cabinet to account very well • Overview and Scrutiny and its three Panels support improvement to Council services very well • The Overview and Scrutiny Committee fulfils its policy and development role very well • The majority of Councillors are very satisfied with the contribution they are able to make to their role and feel very well supported in this role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny does not always influence Cabinet
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint scrutiny with other Agencies and organisations • A Councillor felt he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make to his role because he is relatively newly elected and the more experienced he becomes, the more of a contribution he will be able to make 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Councillor felt he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make to his role

RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1 That the findings contained in this report be used to produce an Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan building upon the good practice undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council.
- 3.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan could then be used to: -
 - Encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
 - Communicate the potential of Scrutiny to local communities
 - Build confidence of those undertaking Scrutiny activities

Northampton Borough Council

Report of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council

1. Purpose

- 1.1 In 2008 the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee instructed the Overview and Scrutiny Team to undertake an evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council (NBC) using the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) self-evaluation framework. The findings from the self-evaluation were used as the basis of developing an Overview and Scrutiny Improvement Plan.
- 1.2 It was agreed that the self-evaluation of the Overview and Scrutiny (O&S) function at Northampton be repeated in 2012, the aim of which is to produce an Excellence Plan for O&S building upon the good practice that has been previously recognised.

2. Context and Background

- 2.1 Effective Overview and Scrutiny should be: -
 - Cross-party working and non-partisan
 - Independent from the Executive
 - Member led, not officer driven
 - Evidence-based and evaluated
 - Engaging the public and reflecting the interests and concerns of local people
 - Making an impact by offering robust recommendations that lead to action by the Council's Cabinet, Council or external Agencies
- 2.2 The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) is a national organisation, that was established to promote the value of Overview and Scrutiny in modern and effective Local Government. The CfPS aims to do this through a number of measures, including the production of guidance, advice on best practice and the promotion of information sharing.

- 2.3 The CfPS reports that public scrutiny is an essential part of ensuring that government remains effective and accountable. Public scrutiny can be defined as the activity by one elected or appointed organisation, or office, examining and monitoring all, or part of, the activity of a public sector body with the aim of improving the quality of public services. A public sector body is one that carries out public functions or spends public money. Scrutiny ensures that executives are held accountable for their decisions, that their decision-making process is clear and accessible to the public and there are opportunities for the public and their representatives to influence and improve public policy.
- 2.4 The CfPS goes on to say that public scrutiny is now moving into another era with community-led scrutiny of local decisions. This is where the public's involvement in challenging local authorities and public service providers on public service improvement and delivery is actively sought by elected representatives (such as MPs or Councillors) or appointed non-executives on governing bodies (such as school governors or non-executive directors of hospital trusts). Constructive and ongoing engagement with stakeholders, from experts to the general public, helps to achieve genuine accountability for the use of public resources.
- 2.5 The CfPS acknowledges that public scrutiny provides a unique perspective on how well public services are being delivered and how they could be improved, from the point of view of those receiving and using those services. This section contains information on the range of bodies engaged in public scrutiny and includes bodies that scrutinise executive government at the central, devolved and local government levels as well as those that inspect and scrutinise distinct public policy areas: criminal justice, education, health and social care, housing and regeneration, public transport and public utilities.
- 2.6 Recognising that each Local Authority carries out its Overview and Scrutiny function in a different way, and there being no objective measure by which its success can be assessed, the CfPS developed its self-evaluation framework. The CfPS recently built upon this framework and devised its "Accountability Works for you" framework.
- 2.7 The CfPS reports that "Accountability Works for You" is a focused and proportionate way to improve the way organisations make

decisions, and how they can respond to and plan for transformation and change

2.8 The CfPS has applied the learning from its "Accountability Works" research to the creation of a new and straightforward way to evaluate and improve your governance arrangements, and make organisations more responsive to change.

2.9 The CfPS goes on to advise that the "Accountability Works for You" framework is designed to be proportionate, relevant and focus on culture and attitudes, rather than process. It is based on robust evidence about the way that accountability, transparency and involvement should work in public services, and is sufficiently flexible to apply to any body delivering a public service. The framework leads users through some straightforward steps, posing questions that are aimed to help the user and the people who use the services to tease out some of the most significant challenges, and focus on achievable ways to improve.

2.10 The CfPS suggests there are four steps to the process:

Step 1 involves the establishment of a small project group to set out what you want to achieve.

Step 2 is a general, high-level evaluation of your current arrangements for accountability, transparency and involvement.

Step 3 allows you to explore in more detail cross-cutting themes that emerged in Step 2.

Step 4 involves the setting of an action plan and the monitoring of that plan in the future.

2.11 The framework is designed to encourage a "pick and mix" approach, allowing organisations to pick those particular elements of the governance arrangements that the user wants to look at in the most detail, or that are most relevant to the organisation. This enables the organisation to be in control throughout, using the framework as a way to explore how it does

business, not as a formulaic tick-box exercise. It is reported that the framework can be amended and used by any organisation.

2.12 The framework focuses three main themes on:

- Transparency
- Involvement
- Accountability

2.13 The framework is intended to provide a clear picture of how Overview and Scrutiny now operates at Northampton Borough Council and how acknowledged good practice themes can be developed. The findings could then be used to: -

- Communicate the potential of Overview and Scrutiny to local communities
- Encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
- Build confidence of those undertaking scrutiny activities
- Demonstrate Overview and Scrutiny's value to auditors and inspectors

3 Methodology

3.1 The Council's Overview and Scrutiny Committee agreed to provide a mechanism for Scrutiny Members to: -

- Demonstrate the effectiveness of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton
- To identify areas and means for further developing Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council
- To provide objectivity by identifying evidence from the questions posed in the framework
- To highlight any potential barriers to improvement

3.2 Peer Reviews

3.2.1 As part of the self-evaluation process, the Scrutiny Teams of two Local Authorities were approached regarding undertaking a peer review of the Overview and Scrutiny function at Northampton Borough Council.

3.2.2 The Scrutiny Officers, Rugby Borough Council, and the Scrutiny Officer and two Scrutiny Chairs, Broxtowe Borough Council, undertook separate peer reviews.

3.2.3 The Scrutiny Team, Rugby Borough Council, evaluated NBC's Overview and Scrutiny by: -

- Evaluating a number of Overview and Scrutiny documents, such as the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit, Policy Review reports, agendas, minutes, Overview and Scrutiny Protocols.
- Interviews with: -
 - The Council's Scrutiny Officer
 - Various Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panels

3.2.4 The Scrutiny Team, Rugby Borough Council, produced a detailed report highlighting their findings. A copy of which is attached at Appendix A.

3.2.5 The following main findings were reported. The questions focussed on the following subjects that are detailed in the CfPS evaluation framework – “Accountability works for you”:

Work programme - development of the programme, the process of choosing reviews and the relevance and importance of the matters now being reviewed

Scrutiny work and evidence gathering - trying to get a feel for whether the three Panels are working well and to establish whether there is clarity about what the reviews are aiming to achieve and whether the work is planned in a systematic and transparent manner

Outcomes and impact – evaluating the extent to which Overview and Scrutiny is making a real difference for local people

Accountability – the relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny, and the ability of Overview and Scrutiny to influence major decisions and monitor performance

3.2.6 Peer Review Key Findings

Rugby Borough Council

3.2.6.1 The report of the Scrutiny Officers of Rugby Borough Council concluded:

- There is strong evidence that the prime consideration in developing this year's work programme was that it should be based on issues that had been put forward by members of the public, whether as individuals or local groups. It is clear from the members who spoke to us that the workshop and the community consultation worked well. The emphasis in the work programme is on scrutinising topics that are important to local people.
- There is less evidence of a conscious link being made between the matters chosen for scrutiny and corporate priorities but this does not mean that the work programme is in any way running counter to the council's strategic direction.
- There is a general consensus that the three-panel arrangement is working better than the former arrangement where seven reviews were in progress at the same time. There is evidence of that all non-executive members are able to be directly involved in overview and scrutiny work and that many are engaged in a positive way.
- There is cross-party working with no whips.
- The reviews are wide-ranging and this means there is a danger of lack of focus. Even with the scopes of these reviews being drawn as widely as they are, there is still pressure from some members to stretch their brief even further or to be distracted by side issues. There is, however, evidence that the Scrutiny Officer performs a valuable role in keeping reviews on track.
- There is extensive involvement of expert witnesses from outside the council, and co-optees are also appointed. Visits are made to other areas to gather evidence from others' experiences.

- New members seem to find the concept of scrutiny hard to grasp at the induction stage. However, the fact that members attend induction sessions is itself a positive sign. It may be that the content of the induction process should be looked at to see whether there is scope for making it easier to understand. Some members believe that they would benefit from some form of mentoring.
- Panel meetings' work is planned by the chairman and vice-chairman, who both meet with the Scrutiny Officer. Having vice-chairmen is seen as a positive way of avoiding too much onus being placed on the chairman to steer the panel.
- There did not appear to be great awareness of the concrete improvements that scrutiny is making and members found it difficult to cite examples of positive outcomes and impact. This may in part be due to the fact that many of the members who spoke to us were quite new councillors.
- The recent Egyptian statue call-in was repeatedly given as the prime example of scrutiny modifying a Cabinet decision and providing a voice for local residents on a matter of community concern.
- The Scrutiny Officers noted that there is a system in place whereby Cabinet members are invited to the O&S Committee to report on progress in implementation of reviews' recommendations. The Scrutiny Officers believe, however, that more could be done to demonstrate the value and impact of overview and scrutiny review work. They suggest that the adoption of a clear action plan at the end of each review – and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – would do much to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.
- It is generally felt that there is a constructive relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet and that Cabinet members help to inform the development of the work programme.
- Call-in is used occasionally.

- Performance monitoring takes place quarterly and we found some evidence of robust questioning of Cabinet members on this and other matters.
- During scrutiny of the budget, there is examination of selected topics and Cabinet Members are involved in the discussions.
- There is also some evidence of influencing decisions before they are made by Cabinet (the Independent Living review being an example of this). The Scrutiny Officers found it difficult to form a clear picture of systems and procedures for pre-decision scrutiny and engagement with Cabinet in general. However, they appreciate that this is an aspect of overview and scrutiny that is challenging for all local authorities.
- The Scrutiny Officers were impressed by the paperless committees' initiative being piloted by Overview and Scrutiny and by the positive way in which members are embracing it. This seems to the Scrutiny Officers to reflect the innovative and forward-looking attitude that we often encountered during our visit.

3.3 Broxtowe Borough Council

3.3.1 The Scrutiny Officer, Broxtowe Borough Council, produced a detailed report highlighting their findings. A copy of which is attached at Appendix B.

3.3.2 The Scrutiny Officer and Scrutiny Chairs undertook their mini peer review in a number of ways:

- Evaluating a number of Overview and Scrutiny documents, such as the Overview and Scrutiny Toolkit, Policy Review reports, agendas, minutes, Protocols.
- Assessing the Council's Overview and Scrutiny webpage
- Observing a Scrutiny Panel meeting
- Interviews with: -
 - Various Members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Scrutiny Panel, that included two non-Executives who are not members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

3.3.3 The questions focussed on the following subjects that are detailed in the CfPS evaluation framework – Accountability works for you:

Efficacy – Does Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council achieve its aims?

Motivation – Do members become less motivated if they don't like a subject? What interests members? How do you keep members motivated? How often do you use external witnesses?

Source of Scrutiny Subjects – How are they generated and selected?

What has gone well with Scrutiny and why?

Panels – Do the different panels have different ways of working? Do they get different results?

Work programme – How do you handle the work programme? Do you feel limited by the system? How do time limits affect reviews? Is there room for prioritising topics?

Do you feel the Council is supportive of Scrutiny? – Officers and members?

Scoping – Who does the scope? Is there any flexibility? Can panels change the scope? Who calls witnesses? How closely do panels prepare for meetings?

Presentation to Cabinet – Are you satisfied with the way reports are presented to Cabinet? Are the outcomes monitored?

Outcomes – What should a good Scrutiny review do? Do the outcomes that are implemented add value to Cabinet's decisions?

3.3.4 The following key findings from Broxtowe Borough Council's report are detailed below:

- Councillors were generally happy with the way Scrutiny works, but there was a discrepancy between those who were in favour and those who weren't.
- Some Councillors were motivated by Scrutiny whilst others felt de-motivated.

- The understanding of the source of subjects displays not only knowledge of the system but also engenders a feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews. This is vital if members are to feel engaged by a review. This is displayed here.
- The discrepancy of support between Cabinet and Scrutiny may suggest that backbenchers would like to be as valued as their Cabinet counterparts.
- Positive comments suggested that councillors and members of the public are engaged by the process.
- The Scrutiny Officer, Broxtowe Borough Council, felt it was also heartening to hear that Scrutiny is viewed as apolitical by members.
- Councillors are happy with the organisation of the annual work programming system which is well run.
- There was resounding support for the work of the Scrutiny Officer with numerous suggestions for further resources to strengthen the position of Scrutiny within the Council.
- It was heartening to hear of support from Heads of Service. This suggests a positive culture from all areas of the Council.
- Good proportion of co-opted members.
- There is generally discipline to stick to a scope. Some leeway if necessary.
- There is an appreciation of the presentation stage and the method by which Scrutiny reports are handed over and the respect with which they are treated.
- Not all Councillors are clear of the monitoring process of O&S Review reports but generally members were happy with outcomes from the process.
- The meeting observed was well organised. The level of preparation prior to the meeting, questions previously submitted to witnesses etc. was impressive.

3.4 Scrutiny at Northampton v CfPS good practice scrutiny Reviews

3.4.1 The Overview and Scrutiny Officer carried out a comparison of Northampton Borough Council's Scrutiny function with that of other districts. The CfPS advises that it is more reticent about holding up Councils as exemplars of "best practice". It feels that there is no one Council that does everything fantastically, and even if there were, the political culture of Councils is so different that certain aspects of their work would not transfer to other Authorities. Instead it suggested that the Overview and Scrutiny Officer looks at examples of excellent Scrutiny work (i.e. a

specific review having significant impacts) and ask what Northampton can do to get there. The CfPS therefore directed the Overview and Scrutiny Officer to the Good Scrutiny Award Winners and a sample of shortlisted nominations for 2012.

3.4.2 Contact was made with:

- Gloucestershire County Council in respect of its Scrutiny work around flood defences
- Bassetlaw District Council in respect of some good health scrutiny work
- Chesterfield District Council, who used “appreciative inquiry” to carry out a review into health inequalities
- Stoke on Trent City Council that looked at Council business services and made recommendations leading to significant financial savings for the Authority

3.4.3 Responses were received from:

- Gloucestershire County Council
- Bassetlaw District Council
- Chesterfield District Council

3.4.4 A copy of the background data is attached at Appendix C.

3.4.5 From the comparison background data, in respect of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton, the following was recognised: -

Comparator	Northampton Borough Council (NBC)	Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC)	Gloucestershire County Council (GCC)	Bassetlaw District Council
Appreciative Inquiry approach to Scrutiny Reviews	NBC has used and adapted this approach for previous Reviews and details were documented in the CfPS publication “A guide to using Appreciative Inquiry to add value to Overview and Scrutiny”.	CBC used the Appreciative Inquiry approach to conduct its Review “Rother Matters”. This was a very high profile piece of Scrutiny work that followed the Appreciative Inquiry Framework. This Review was shortlisted for an award at the CfPS Good Scrutiny Awards 2012.		
Involve key stakeholders at the Scoping stage	In the main, Panel members, together with NBC Officers, scope a Review	CBC involved all key players in its Review “Rother Matters” from the outset	GCC involved key players from a variety of Agencies in its initial setting the scene meeting of its Review - Severn Estuary	

	<p>However for the Review – Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector, co optees (members of the VCS) were involved at the scoping stage</p>		Shoreline Management”	
Reviews have made a real difference	<p>Scrutiny at NBC has undertaken a number of Reviews that have made a real difference such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Independent Living for Older People • Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy • Community Centres <p>Details of the Review – Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy have featured in a CfPS publication</p> <p>The Chair of the Scrutiny Panel – Independent Living for Older People, gave a presentation on this piece of Scrutiny work to a Health and Wellbeing Forum in 2012</p>	<p>Key example provided by CfPS:</p> <p>“Rother Matters”</p>	<p>Key example provided by CfPS:</p> <p>“Severn Estuary Shoreline Management”</p>	<p>Key example provided by CfPS:</p> <p>The future services at Bassetlaw Hospital</p>
Partnership working	<p>A number of Scrutiny Reviews have involved partnership working including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Northamptonshire Alcohol Strategy • Independent Living for Older People • Hate Crime Reporting • Commissioning Framework for the Voluntary and Community Sector • Contaminated Water Incident 	<p>The Review “Rother Matters” involved partnership working</p>	<p>“Severn Estuary Shoreline Management”</p>	<p>It is reported that from the review firm foundations have been laid for future health scrutiny and joint working with health service providers and commissioners.</p>

3.5 Desktop Research

3.5.1 Desktop research was carried out using the Centre for Public Scrutiny's "Accountability Works for You" framework.

3.5.2 The Chair and Vice Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, together with the Overview and Scrutiny Officer, completed a series of questions based on the followed areas identified in the framework:




- Work Programme
- Work of the Panels – Evidence gathering
- Outcomes and impact
- Accountability role

3.5.3 Comments and observations are reflected in the evaluation findings at Appendix D.




4 Analysis

4.1 From the evaluation framework of the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton, the following was realised:-

4.2 Of the four areas of enquiry:-

69.23% are okay (9) 
30.77% are potential warning areas (4) 
0% is alert areas (0) 

4.3 This was an increase from the findings from the Self Evaluation of O&S undertaken in 2008:

50% are okay (25) 
26% are potential warning areas(13) 
16% are alert areas (8) 

4.4 It is highlighted that it is difficult to carry out a direct comparison as different frameworks were used however it is highlighted that no areas of enquiry for 2012 were denoted as alert areas.

5 Summary of Member Comments – Survey 2012

5.1 All Councillors who attended meetings with the Peer Reviewers were also sent a short questionnaire, comprising six main questions regarding the Overview and Scrutiny process at NBC.

5.2 Eight Councillors completed questionnaires and these were returned anonymously to the Overview and Scrutiny Officer. Some had additional comments made, which are summarised below:

- Scrutiny is active but doesn't always influence the Administration. Scrutiny should have more "teeth."
- The Councillor who advised he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make with his role was because he feels he is relatively newly elected.
- Resources for scrutiny are very limited compared to other areas of the Authority, however the work done with these limited resources is, in my opinion, excellent and this is largely due to the Scrutiny Officer and the enthusiasm of its members.

5.3 Detailed at Appendix E are the results of the questionnaires.

6 Key Findings

6.1 After all the evidence was gathered, the following key findings in relation to the Overview and Scrutiny process at Northampton were drawn: -

6.1.1 CfPS's Framework - Accountability Works for You Framework

Findings from the report of the Chair and Vice Chair of Overview and Scrutiny:

Achievements

- Good relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny.
- Overview and Scrutiny has a vigorous monitoring work programme. It ensures all accepted recommendations are implemented before the report is signed off from the monitoring work programme.
- Cabinet Members attend Overview and Scrutiny meetings, as appropriate, and provide feedback to Overview and Scrutiny when monitoring the accepted recommendations in its Review reports takes place via the formal monitoring process.
- The call-in procedure is used sparingly.
- Scrutiny Panels are non-partisan and focus on the issue being reviewed. They are working effectively with some good issue-based Reviews.

- There are examples where changes for the public have been made as a result of the work of O&S.
- Overview and Scrutiny sets its own work programme and involves Cabinet and the public in influencing suggestions.
- Good working relationship with partners and key Agencies and O&S makes good use of external witnesses and experts.
- Good scrutiny performance monitoring which has led to recommendations being made.
- Comprehensive O&S webpage (www.northampton.gov.uk/scrutiny)
- Public attendance and speaking is welcomed at every Overview and Scrutiny Committee and Panel meeting.
- There has been good press coverage of Scrutiny at Northampton, including promotion of an invitation to suggest a potential review, the work programme and the innovative Paperless Committees Trial.
- Aspects of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton continue to be noted as best practice.
- Scrutiny is generally of a consensus nature and it is rare for a vote to be used.

Challenges

- On occasions, during early evidence gathering, the Panel may go outside its scope but the compilation of the core questions to be put to key witnesses brings focus back.
- On occasions, specialist Officers may provide too much direction into the scope of the Review.
- More use of the pre-decision scrutiny role.

Suggested changes

- The Leader of the Council should be invited to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, mid-year, to provide an update on Cabinet's priorities, this will follow on from Cabinet's attendance at the annual Work Programme event. This will assist in strengthening the pre-decision scrutiny process.
- Upon publication of the Executive Business List, The Scrutiny Officer, on behalf of the Chair of O&S, contacts all members of the O&S Committee asking them to forward any items that it feels would warrant pre-decision scrutiny.
- The evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny continues to be carried out every two years.

- An Excellence Plan for Overview and Scrutiny to be introduced following the evaluation.

4.1.2 Peer Review – Rugby Borough Council

Achievements

- The three-panel arrangement is working better than the former arrangement.
- There is evidence that all non-executive members are able to be directly involved in Overview and Scrutiny work and that many are engaged in a positive way.
- There is cross-party working with no whips.
- Extensive use of external witnesses with robust and effective questioning.
- Panel meetings' work is planned by the chairman and vice-chairman, who both meet with the Scrutiny Officer.
- Having vice-chairmen is seen as a positive way of avoiding too much onus being placed on the chairman to steer the panel.
- There is a constructive relationship between Overview and Scrutiny and the Cabinet and that Cabinet members help to inform the development of the work programme.
- There is some evidence of influencing decisions before they are made by Cabinet (the Independent Living review being an example of this).
- Good budget scrutiny process.
- The Scrutiny officers were impressed by the paperless Committees' initiative being piloted by overview and scrutiny and the positive way in which members are embracing it. This seems to them to reflect the innovative and forward-looking attitude they often encountered during their visit.
- Overview and Scrutiny has moved on considerably since the Scrutiny Officers' visit in 2008, and there have been a number of achievements of which members are justifiably proud.

Challenges

- The Reviews are wide-ranging and this means there is a danger of lack of focus.
- Even with the scopes of these reviews being drawn as widely as they are, there is still pressure from some members to stretch their brief even further or to be distracted by side issues. There is,

however, evidence that the Scrutiny Officer performs a valuable role in keeping reviews on track.

- New members seem to find the concept of scrutiny hard to grasp at the induction stage.
- More could be done to demonstrate the value and impact of overview and scrutiny review work.
- The Scrutiny Officers found it difficult to form a clear picture of systems and procedures for pre-decision scrutiny and engagement with Cabinet in general. However, we appreciate that this is an aspect of overview and scrutiny that is challenging for all local authorities.

Suggested Changes

From the report of the Scrutiny Officers, Rugby Borough Council, the following suggested changes have been derived at from the challenges reported:

- The adoption of a clear Action Plan at the end of each Review and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that Plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.
- More robust pre-decision scrutiny processes.

4.1.3 Peer Review- Broxtowe Borough Council

Achievements

- Pre-decision Scrutiny works well.
- Scrutiny adds value to the role of Councillors.
- Scrutiny recognised as independent.
- Wide ranging Reviews.
- It is an education for Councillors on the workings of the Council and partnership working.
- A feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews - Members feel engaged by a review at Northampton.
- The understanding of the source of subjects displays not only knowledge of the system but also engenders a feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews. This is vital if members are to feel engaged by a review. This is displayed here.
- Scrutiny is apolitical.
- Scrutiny is transparent.
- All Reviews work to the same rules and procedures however there is leeway for Chairs to work in different ways.
- No whipping.

- Good guidance is provided by the Scrutiny Officer.
- Members of the public are engaged and encouraged.
- Well organised work programming setting event.
- Positive culture towards scrutiny.
- Excellent standard of Review reports.

Challenges

- Confusion amongst members over the role of Scrutiny.
- Some Councillors need a better understanding of the system..
- Questions over whether the most able people were chairs and vice chairs
- Some Members aren't interested.
- Scrutiny needs an equal footing.
- Not all Councillors are clear of the robust monitoring system that Overview and Scrutiny has in place.
- Need to measure outcomes of a Scrutiny Review.

Suggested Changes

From the findings of report of the Scrutiny Officer, Broxtowe Borough Council, the following suggested changes are proposed:

- Each Scrutiny Panel to be informed of the monitoring process of accepted recommendations contained in Review reports at the scoping meeting.
- The adoption of a clear Action Plan at the end of each Review and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that Plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.

4.1.4 Scrutiny at Northampton v CfPS good practice scrutiny districts in the way that Reviews are undertaken

Achievements

- Overview and Scrutiny has used innovative methods to conduct reviews previously.
- Good partnership working.
- A number of Reviews have made a real difference.

Challenges

- Partners are not normally involved at the scoping stage of a Review.

Suggested Changes

- Although O&S at Northampton has previously used the Appreciative Inquiry to conducting a Review, consideration should be given to using this method, as appropriate, for a forthcoming Review, using the 5-D mode.
- For appropriate Reviews, partners should be involved at the scoping stages.

4.1.4 Member Survey

Strengths	Weaknesses
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Excellent engagement between Overview and Scrutiny and external Agencies • Overview and Scrutiny fulfils its role of holding Cabinet to account very well • Overview and Scrutiny and its three Panels support improvement to Council services very well • The Overview and Scrutiny Committee fulfils its policy and development role very well • The majority of Councillors are very satisfied with the contribution they are able to make to their role and feel very well supported in this role 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scrutiny does not always influence Cabinet
Opportunities	Threats
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Joint scrutiny with other Agencies and organisations • A Councillor felt he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make to his role because he is relatively newly elected and the more experienced he becomes, the more of a contribution he will be able to make 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A Councillor felt he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make to his role

6 Recommendations

- 6.1 That the findings contained in this report be used to produce an Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan building upon the good practice undertaken by Overview & Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council.
- 6.2 That the Overview and Scrutiny Excellence Plan could then be used to: -
- Encourage involvement in the process of those being scrutinised
 - Communicate the potential of Scrutiny to local communities
 - Build confidence of those undertaking Scrutiny activities

Appendices

Peer Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council

17 October 2012

Carried out by Paul Ansell and Debbie Dawson, Scrutiny Officers at Rugby Borough Council.

METHODOLOGY

For reasons entirely of our own, we were only able to spend part of one day at Northampton, so we had to be selective in the aspects of overview and scrutiny that we evaluated. We chose aspects that not only seemed to be important but also about which it was not so easy to gather evidence from other sources. They tended to be about how well things are working in practice rather than about what the formal procedures are.

We had discussions with six non-executive councillors, focusing on the following subjects, which we took from the CfPS evaluation framework *Accountability Works for You*:

Work programme – development of the programme, the process of choosing reviews and the relevance and importance of the matters now being reviewed

Scrutiny work and evidence gathering – trying to get a feel for whether the three panels are working well and to establish whether there is clarity about what the reviews are aiming to achieve and whether the work is planned in a systematic and transparent manner

Outcomes and impact – evaluating the extent to which overview and scrutiny is making a real difference for local people

Accountability – the relationship between Cabinet and overview and scrutiny, and the ability of overview and scrutiny to influence major decisions and monitor performance

WORK PROGRAMME

There is strong evidence that the prime consideration in developing this year's work programme was that it should be based on issues that had been put forward by members of the public, whether as individuals or local groups. It is clear from the members who spoke to us that the workshop and the community consultation worked well. The emphasis in the work programme is on scrutinising topics that are important to local people.

There is less evidence of a conscious link being made between the matters chosen for scrutiny and corporate priorities but this does not mean that the work programme is in any way running counter to the council's strategic direction.

Members spoke highly of the support from officers in the work programming process.

SCRUTINY WORK AND EVIDENCE GATHERING

There is a general consensus that the three-panel arrangement is working better than the former arrangement where seven reviews were in progress at the same time. There is evidence of that all non-executive members are able to be directly involved in overview and scrutiny work and that many are engaged in a positive way. A number of members take personal responsibility for review work by gathering evidence from a range of sources (eg visits, conferences and community contacts) and reporting back to the panel. There is cross-party working with no whips.

The reviews are wide-ranging and this means there is a danger of lack of focus. Even with the scopes of these reviews being drawn as widely as they are, there is still pressure from some members to stretch their brief even further or to be distracted by side issues. There is, however, evidence that the Scrutiny Officer performs a valuable role in keeping reviews on track.

There is extensive involvement of expert witnesses from outside the council, and co-optees are also appointed. There is some evidence of robust and effective questioning of witnesses. Visits are made to other areas to gather evidence from others' experiences.

New members seem to find the concept of scrutiny hard to grasp at the induction stage. However, the fact that members attend induction sessions is itself a positive sign. It may be that the content of the induction process should be looked at to see whether there is scope for making it easier to understand. Some members believe that they would benefit from some form of mentoring.

Panel meetings' work is planned by the chairman and vice-chairman, who both meet with the Scrutiny Officer. Having vice-chairmen is seen as a positive way of avoiding too much onus being placed on the chairman to steer the panel.

OUTCOMES AND IMPACT

A range of opinion was expressed about the actual impact on the lives of people in Northampton.

There did not appear to be great awareness of the concrete improvements that scrutiny is making and members found it difficult to cite examples of positive outcomes and impact. This may in part be due to the fact that many of the members who spoke to us were quite new councillors.

The recent Egyptian statue call-in was repeatedly given as the prime example of scrutiny modifying a Cabinet decision and providing a voice for local residents on a matter of community concern.

We note that there is a system in place whereby Cabinet members are invited to the O&S Committee to report on progress in implementation of reviews' recommendations. We believe, however, that more could be done to demonstrate

the value and impact of overview and scrutiny review work. We suggest that the adoption of a clear action plan at the end of each review – and the subsequent periodic monitoring of that plan by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee – would do much to guarantee that tangible outcomes are delivered.

ACCOUNTABILITY

It is generally felt that there is a constructive relationship between overview and scrutiny and the Cabinet and that Cabinet members help to inform the development of the work programme.

Call-in is used occasionally.

Performance monitoring takes place quarterly and we found some evidence of robust questioning of Cabinet members on this and other matters.

During scrutiny of the budget, there is examination of selected topics and portfolio holders are involved in the discussions.

There is also some evidence of influencing decisions before they are made by Cabinet (the Independent Living review being an example of this). We found it difficult to form a clear picture of systems and procedures for pre-decision scrutiny and engagement with Cabinet in general. However, we appreciate that this is an aspect of overview and scrutiny that is challenging for all local authorities.

CONCLUSION

It must be stressed that this report is not judgemental. It is for the council to shape its scrutiny in a way that it considers best serves local needs.

We would like to thank the members for their active and enthusiastic participation in our discussions. It is clear that overview and scrutiny has moved on considerably since our visit in 2008, and that there have been a number of achievements of which members are justifiably proud.

We would add that we were impressed by the paperless committees initiative being piloted by overview and scrutiny and by the positive way in which members are embracing it. This seems to us to reflect the innovative and forward-looking attitude that we often encountered during our visit.

Peer Evaluation of Overview and Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council

26 November 2012

Undertaken by representatives from Broxtowe Borough Council:

- Jeremy Ward – Scrutiny/Democratic Services Officer
- Councillor Brian Wombwell – Chair of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee
- Councillor Janet Patrick – Chair of the People and Places Examination and Inquiry Group, member of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee

METHODOLOGY

Prior to the discussions we met to consider which questions would be suitable. It was decided to ask the same question of each councillor, following this, answers could be compared. However, in practice it was clear that some questions either 'didn't work' or following several consistent answers it was clear that other areas lines of questioning should be followed. Therefore, the later questions were modified in situ.

The discussions with seven non-executive councillors, focused on the following subjects, were influenced by the Centre for Public Scrutiny's evaluation framework *Accountability Works for You*:

Efficacy – Does Scrutiny at Northampton Borough Council achieve its aims?

Motivation – Do members become less motivated if they don't like a subject? What is that interests members? How do you keep members motivated? How often do you use external witnesses?

Source of Scrutiny Subjects – How are they generated and selected?

What has gone well with Scrutiny and why?

Panels – Do the different panels have different ways of working? Do they get different results?

Work programme – How do you handle the work programme? Do you feel limited by the system? How do time limits affect reviews? Is there room for prioritising topics?

Do you feel the Council is supportive of Scrutiny? – Officers and members?

Scoping – Who does the scope? Is there any flexibility? Can panels change the scope? Who calls witnesses? How closely do panels prepare for meetings?

Presentation to Cabinet – Are you satisfied with the way reports are presented to Cabinet? Are the outcomes monitored?

Outcomes – What should a good Scrutiny review do? Do the outcomes that are implemented add value to Cabinet’s decisions?

EFFICACY

Comments/observations:

- Confusion amongst members over the role of Scrutiny
- Questions over whether the most able people were chairs and vice chairs
- ‘We have no powers – Cabinet has all of the power’
- Pre-decision Scrutiny works well
- Scrutiny adds value to the role of councillors
- It is an education for councillors on the workings of the Council and partnership working

Conclusions:

Councillors were generally happy with the way Scrutiny works, although there was a discrepancy between those who were in favour and those who weren’t. It was interesting to note how strong the divided opinions were, almost as though those speaking were from completely different councils.

MOTIVATION

Comments/observations:

- Seen as independent and ‘free of dogma’
- Members are never whipped
- Some members aren’t interested

Conclusions:

Again (and this will become a pattern), some councillors were motivated by Scrutiny while others felt de-motivated. There were strongly divided opinions. This is exactly the same at Broxtowe. I don’t think there is any merit in concentrating on those with vehemently negative opinions that do not offer constructive criticism.

SOURCE OF SCRUTINY SUBJECTS

Comments/observations:

- Wide range of subjects that are covered really well
- There is discipline within scoping
- Understanding of how they are generated

Conclusions:

The understanding of the source of subjects displays not only knowledge of the system but also engenders a feeling of ownership of Scrutiny reviews. This is vital if members are to feel engaged by a review. This is displayed here.

WHAT HAS GONE WELL WITH SCRUTINY AND WHY, ALSO WHAT HAVE YOU STRUGGLED WITH?

Comments/observations:

- Scrutiny is the poor relation to Cabinet
- There is a discrepancy of support between Cabinet and Scrutiny
- Scrutiny needs an equal footing
- Less committed councillors are in Scrutiny
- Committee system would be better as councillors are more engaged and involved
- Can be exceptionally useful – it's a golden opportunity
- It is apolitical
- Members of the public are engaged and encouraged
- Can find out all of the Council's business and gain in-depth knowledge about many subjects
- Some councillors don't take it seriously
- It would work better if councillors had a better understanding of the system
- Public take interest
- The website is informative

Conclusions:

Once again, this questioning invoked positive and negative answers. The aim of the question was to elicit remarks that would promote good practice and discover areas for improvement. However, some councillors took the opportunity to repeat observations mentioned previously. It is worth noting the discrepancy of support between Cabinet and Scrutiny may suggest that backbenchers would like to be as valued as their Cabinet counterparts. Positive comments suggested that councillors and members of the public are engaged by the process. It was also heartening to hear that Scrutiny is viewed as apolitical by members.

PANELS

Comments/observations:

- Panels don't meet regularly enough – momentum is lost
- Good transparency – happy with the way it is done
- Evening meetings mean there is limited time
- All work to the same rules but chairs work in different ways
- The Scrutiny Officer provides good guidance

Conclusions:

It was interesting and unexpected to hear an advocate for more meetings, although more expected to hear that chairs shape their own panels (the indisputable law of Scrutiny).

WORK PROGRAMME

Comments/observations:

- Only constraint through work programme is on the Scrutiny Officer
- Outstanding issues carry over to the new committee year
- Good provision for flexibility if necessary

Conclusions:

Questions were asked on the annual work programme as it is integral to the way councillors form views on the running of Scrutiny. There was little comment which would suggest that councillors were happy with the organisation of the system which is well run.

DO YOU FEEL THE COUNCIL IS SUPPORTIVE OF SCRUTINY?

Comments/observations:

- The Scrutiny Officer is extremely good, objective
- "The Scrutiny Officer is brilliant!"
- There is a need more Scrutiny officers
- Needs to be given an equal status, more clout, more officers
- Training programme is structured but not well supported
- More resources to support the Scrutiny Officer would mean more time to commit to each individual review
- There is independence in the culture of Scrutiny
- There is no interference from officers or the executive
- More resources are necessary
- There is a sense that members are doing good work which helps the Council and is taken seriously by Cabinet
- It is important there is more financial support for Scrutiny. It does not need to be in isolation from the rest of the Council
- Heads of Service attend as appropriate
- Support depends on aims
- Members support Scrutiny as it is an opportunity to influence even if not in a position of power
- Portfolio Holders are invited at different stages of a review. They input but not influence

Conclusions:

There was resounding support for the work of the Scrutiny Officer with numerous suggestions for further resources to strengthen the position of Scrutiny within the Council. It was heartening to hear of support from Heads of Service. This suggests a positive culture from all areas of the Council.

SCOPING

Comments/observations:

- We look for measurable outcomes
- Chairs and members both call the witnesses.
- Good proportion of co-opted members
- There is generally discipline to stick to a scope. Some leeway if necessary

Conclusions:

As referred to previously, attitudes to scoping also show engagement and ownership of the process. There were no dissenting voices during questions on the scope of topics.

PRESENTATION TO CABINET

Comments/observations:

- The standard of the reports was excellent and appreciated by councillors
- Clear understanding of the way reports are presented to Cabinet in addition to expectations placed on Cabinet to respond and the monitoring of recommendations
- No sense of ownership with reports
- There is monitoring of recommendations but you have to find it
- Important to ensure monitoring takes place as it ensures recommendations are being implemented

Conclusions:

This section provided differences in answers that could have been predicted from councillors who whether either in favour of Scrutiny or against. The majority of answers indicate there is an appreciation of the presentation stage and the method by which reports are handed over and the respect with which they are treated.

OUTCOMES

Comments/observations:

- Scrutiny should have the right of sanction

- Government does not give Scrutiny enough powers
- Recommendations are not dealt with seriously enough
- Monitored well. Cabinet members are questioned at OSC meetings, along with lead officers
- Outcomes are decided on at the beginning. It is necessary that they are always measurable
- Outcomes are not measurable

Conclusions:

The final stage of the process considered was to consider the monitoring process as this gives councillors a retained sense of ownership. Again, there was some confusion, but generally members were happy with outcomes from the process.

MEETING

- Although we were only able to stay for an hour of the meeting it was obvious that the meeting was well organised. The level of preparation prior to the meeting, questions previously submitted to witnesses etc, was impressive.

Comparison against the Review process of other Local Authorities noted by the Centre for Public Scrutiny as good examples

Background data

This comparison data is based on the Review reports submitted by the Local Authorities to the Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) Good Scrutiny Awards 2012, or other information, and does not compare against the Scrutiny process as a whole:

Chesterfield Borough Council

Chesterfield Borough Council (CBC) used the Appreciative Inquiry method for carrying out its Review – “Rother Matters”.

Appreciative Inquiry is a technique that aims to uncover the best things about the organisation, team, community or project being investigated. It is reported as being a positive tool, and is used frequently in an organisational change environment and in community development. It is noted as becoming an increasingly popular scrutiny tool.

CBC used the 5-D model:

To define Positive focus of the Inquiry

To discover Appreciating the valuing and best of what already exists

To dream Create a vision of what might be

To design Using information/stories gathered to work out what things should be like

To deliver Innovating – best ways of ‘doing’ in the future

A Panel was formed comprising Councillors and key players. This Panel moved the actions of the project forward, with actions being divided between all members, not just Scrutiny Councillors. The Panel agreed at its scoping meeting what needed to be achieved and the relevant actions. It appointed a Planning Group that also held meetings but not as many as that of the Panel.

A bid was put in for support from a Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) advisor to support the work and some of this funding was used for providing training to the Planning Group on the appreciative inquiry approach.

Overview and Scrutiny relaxed the way it usually works, and who it works with, which fitted the appreciative inquiry technique.

The Panel operated flexibly with a proactive focus to achieve the outcome together, as opposed to having a holding to account focus. This approached enhanced Scrutiny's policy development role.

The Panel did not call witnesses to its meetings.

The focus of the work of the Panel was to work together to make improvements. As part of the evidence gathering process, a simple survey was compiled and distributed amongst the community for completion. The survey focussed on the positive questions, with evidence requested on what is working well, good experiences and good feelings. There were no questions posed in respect of any problems or potential problems.

The Planning Group went out to the community and conducted face to face interviews.

An event was held, linking to a system approach, bringing the community together.

The reported benefits of this appreciative inquiry are:

- Focus on the positive aspects – which ensured all wanted to work together to achieve the same outcomes – positive psychology
- All key players showed energy for the Review
- No reactive backward looking
- A presentation on the outcomes of the Appreciative Inquiry was given to all Councillors at CBC

Gloucestershire County Council

The Scrutiny Officer, Gloucestershire County Council, provided a copy of the "Scrutiny in Gloucestershire Annual Report 2011-2012 – Making a difference". From this, details of its Review "Severn Estuary Shoreline Management" were obtained.

A Scrutiny Task Group was set up to look at the Environment Agency's proposals to manage flood risk on the Severn Estuary. A wide range of stakeholders were invited to give their views, including community groups. The result of the Review being that the Environment Agency adopted a new approach in working closely with local communities.

The role of the Task Group was to contribute to the Environment Agency's emerging plans for managing flood risk on the Severn Estuary. The Group also considered critical infrastructure issues. An initial scene setting meeting was held and included representatives:

Parish Councils in the affected area

Environment Agency
Natural England
Lower Severn Internal Drainage Board
National Farmers Union
Stroud District Council
Gloucester City Council

Bassetlaw District Council

Bassetlaw DC (BDC) undertook a Review “The Future of Services at Bassetlaw Hospital”.

It reports this Review was carried out at a time of unprecedented change within the NHS. The role of the Panel was to find out what plans were in place of service delivery at Bassetlaw Hospital, how decisions about service delivery were being made/communicated and how new commissioning arrangements might affect the future sustainability of the service. The Panel focused on ensuring that the best possible range of services that could be delivered safely was offered at Bassetlaw Hospital.




It is reported that the Review was timely in that it enabled the Panel to access the facts and plans to make sure they were communicated clearly to the public. There had been a media article about the future of service delivery at Bassetlaw Hospital. Communities were concerned about the possible loss of services or proposed changes to services that they felt were unsafe. Patients’ experiences were highlighted and addressed in the report.

There was positive outcomes and change from this Review, including:




- Clarity in communication from Bassetlaw Hospital
- More pro-active marketing of hospital services
- Cultural change
- Services changes
- Patient experience
- Marketing the hospital to junior doctors

Overview and Scrutiny – Self-Evaluation process

completed by: Councillor Les Marriott (Chair)
 Councillor Matt Lynch (Vice Chair)
 Tracy Tiff, Scrutiny Officer

Key Line of Enquiry	Evidence base
<p>Work Programme</p> <p>Process of developing the work programme</p> <p>Assessing the merit of different suggestions</p> <p>Topics for Panels (for example, community interest, strategic priorities)</p>	<p>Suggestions from the public for Scrutiny Review has increased. Over thirty suggestions were received in 2011/2012. The work programme for 2011/2012 was influenced totally by public suggestions. </p> <p>The work programming event is open to all non Executives and Cabinet address the event informing of its priorities for the year. The work programming event breaks into Groups that then prioritise potential reviews, based on Cabinet’s priorities, public suggestions, suggestions put forward by the O&S Committee and Councillors individual thoughts. Directors, or Heads of Service, circulate amongst the Groups offering comment on the suggestions. Each Group puts forward around four suggestions and the Overview and Scrutiny Committee at its next meeting prioritises the suggestions to form its work programme for the following year. </p> <p>Cabinet informs the work programming event of its priorities for the year. </p> <p>A survey is sent to all those previously involved, or who attended a meeting of Overview and Scrutiny asking for suggestions for future Scrutiny review. The press promote the request for public suggestions and questionnaires are on display in the One Stop Shop and various community venues. The scrutiny webpage also promotes the request for ideas for future scrutiny.</p>

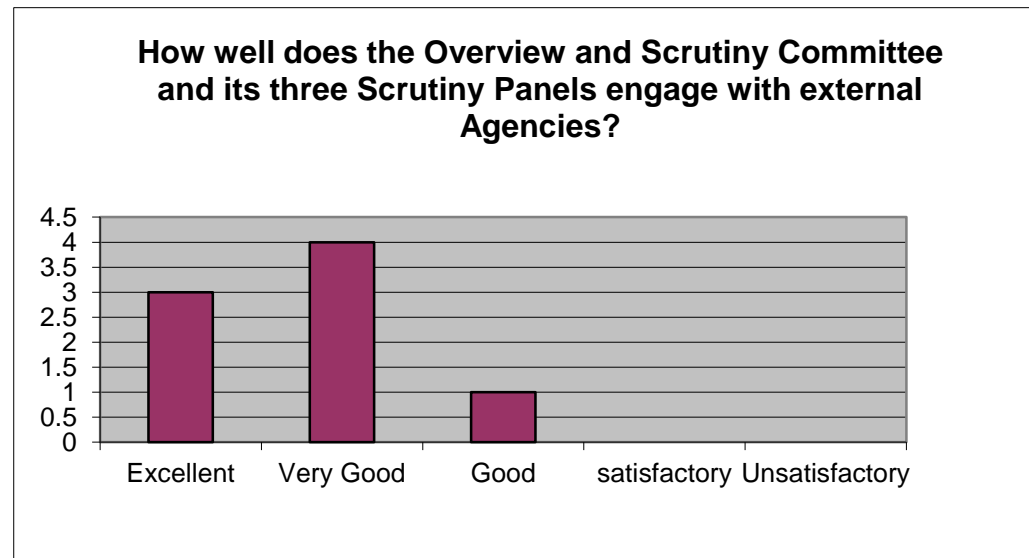
<p>Has the work of O&S made a difference, (including monitoring of recommendations)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Councillor Empowerment Fund • Independent Living Strategy <p>Have made changes for the public as a result of the work of O&S.</p> <p>The current work programme 2012/2013 comprises three in depth reviews, all of which were put forward by the public, in particular the following have real potential to make a difference to the public:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Retail experience • Serious Acquisitive Crime, violent crime and community safety <p>Overview and Scrutiny has a vigorous monitoring work programme and it ensures all accepted recommendations are implemented before the report is signed off from the work programme. The relevant Cabinet Member and Head of Service are asked to attend and provide updates on the progress of the accepted recommendation and this continues at intervals until all recommendations are implemented.</p>
<p>Accountability role</p> <p>Relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny</p> <p>How is the Executive held to account</p>	<p>The Chair and Vice Chair felt that the relationship between Cabinet and Overview and Scrutiny is very good – for example Cabinet attend the Overview and Scrutiny Work Programming event and provide input by apprising of its priorities for the year. Cabinet attend meetings of the O&S Committee and its three Panels when requested.</p> <p>At Northampton call-in is used sparingly and during 2010/2011, the facility was not used at all. A call in was held in September 2012 about the disposal of a museum artefact where the check and balance arm of Scrutiny were tested.</p>

<p>Monitoring the overall performance of the Council</p>	<p>The Chair and Vice Chair felt the Local Government Scrutiny Inquiry could have been involved at an earlier stage to fulfil its pre decision scrutiny role. The Chair and Vice Chair felt the pre decision role of Scrutiny could be used more. </p> <p>The Overview and Scrutiny Committee undertakes performance management scrutiny by investigating the performance monitoring reports, identifying any performance indicators that it feels warrant further investigation. The Cabinet Member and relevant Head of Service attend a meeting of the Committee and provide further details. Performance management scrutiny had previously led to recommendations being implemented. </p> <p>The Chair and Vice Chair felt that, on occasions, the monitoring of accepted recommendations contained within an Overview and Scrutiny report can be limited. The example they provided was in respect of Neighbourhood Model. </p>
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How well does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its three Scrutiny Panels engage with external Agencies?



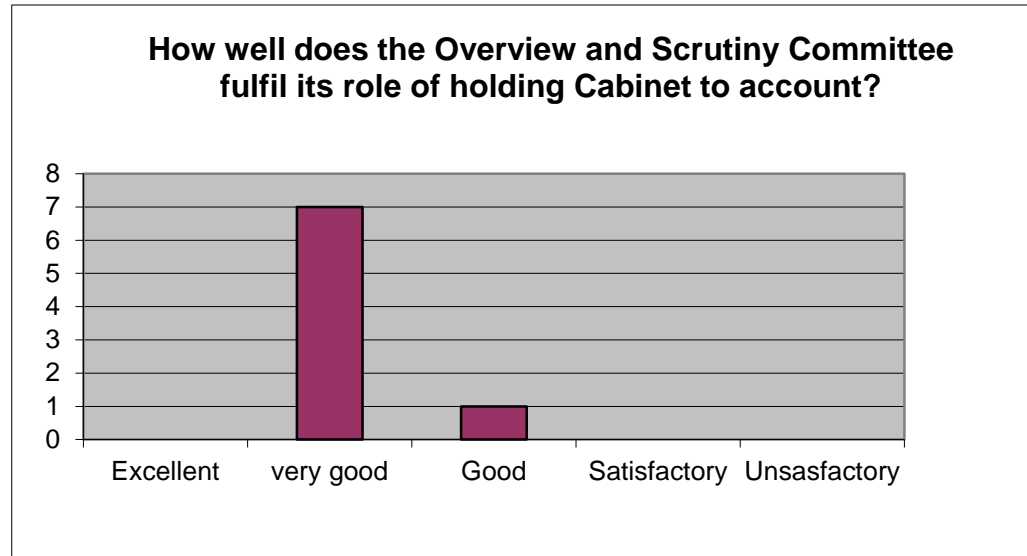
Excellent	3
Very Good	4
Good	1
satisfactory	0
Unsatisfactory	0



How well does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee fulfil its role of holding Cabinet to account?



Excellent	0
very good	7
Good	1
Satisfactory	0
Unsasfactory	0

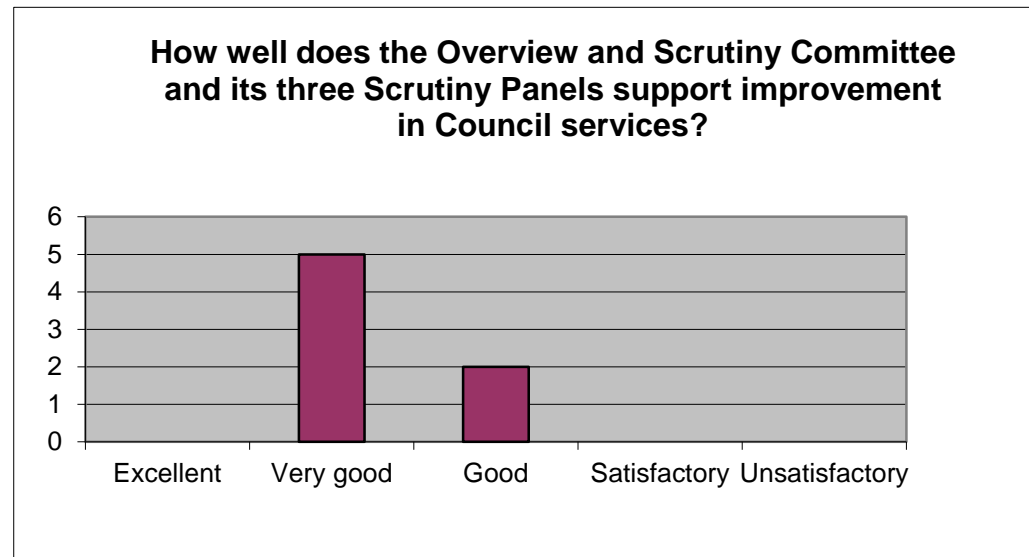


Additional comments: Scrutiny is active but doesn't always influence the Administration. Scrutiny should have more "teeth."

How well does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee and its three Scrutiny Panels support improvement in Council services?



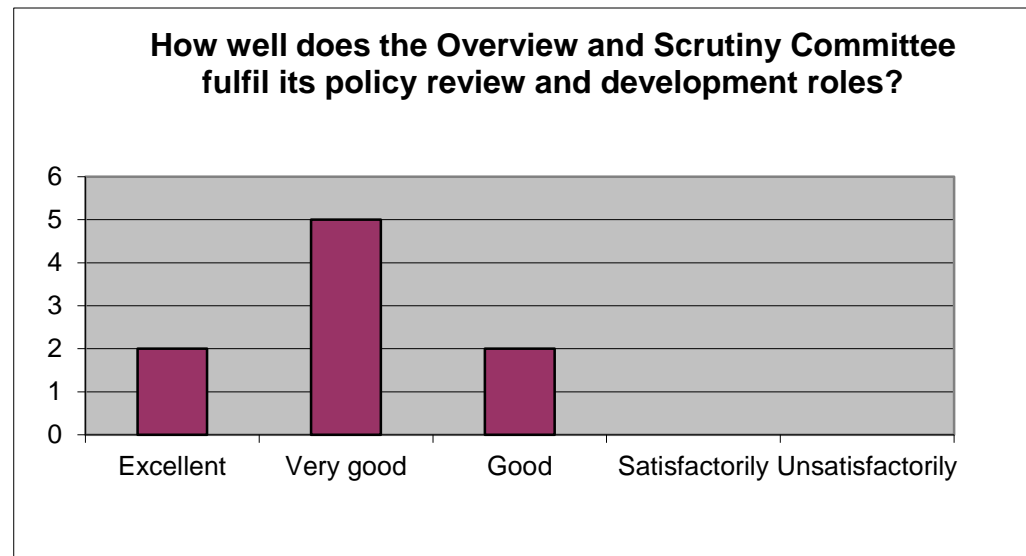
Excellent	0
Very good	5
Good	2
Satisfactory	0
Unsatisfactory	0
Unanswered	1



How well does the Overview and Scrutiny Committee fulfil its policy review and development role?



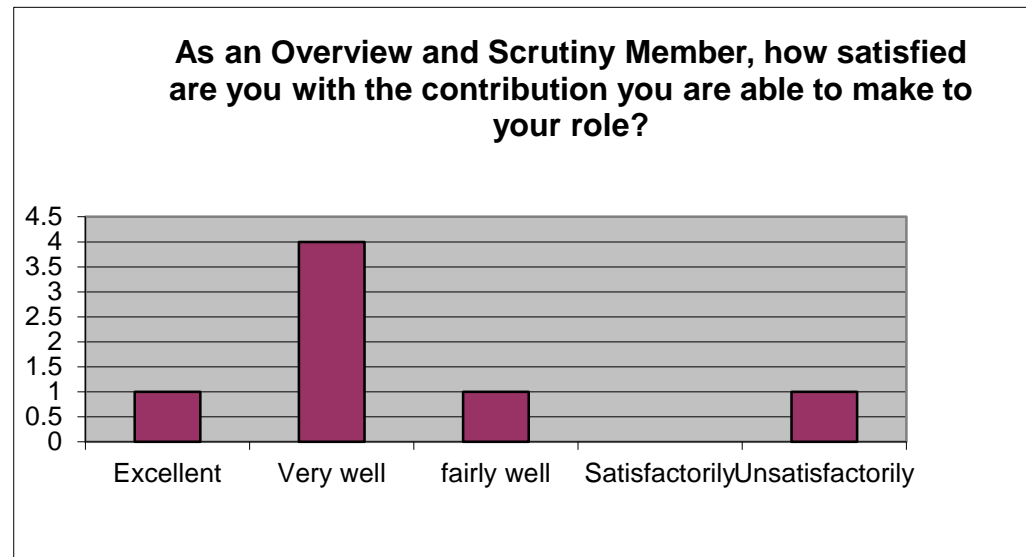
Excellent	2
Very good	5
Good	2
Satisfactorily	0
Unsatisfactorily	0



As an Overview and Scrutiny Member, how satisfied are you with the contribution you are able to make to your role?



Excellent	1
Very well	4
fairly well	1
Satisfactorily	0
Unsatisfactorily	1



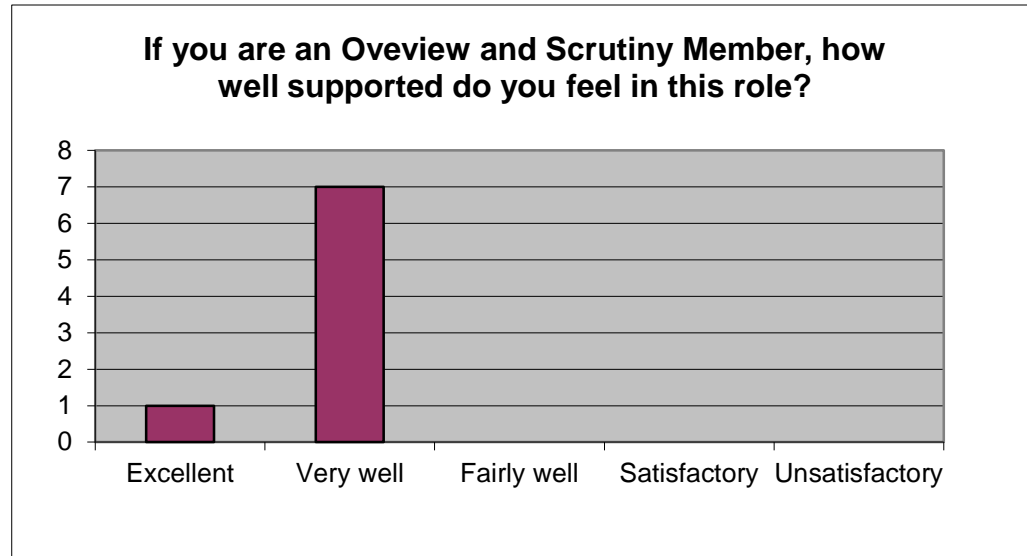
NB the Councillor who advised he was not satisfied with the contribution he is able to make with his role was due to the fact that he feels he is relatively newly ele and the more experienced he becomes, the more of a contribution he will be able to make

ected

If you are an Overview and Scrutiny Member, how well supported do you feel in this role?



Excellent	1
Very well	7
Fairly well	0
Satisfactory	0
Unsatisfactory	0



Additional comments received:

Resources for scrutiny are very limited compared to other areas of the Authority, however, the work done with these limited resources is, in my opinion excellent and this is largely due to the Scrutiny Officer and the enthusiasm of its members