



## **OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE**

### **ANNUAL REPORT**

**2012/13**

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June 2013

## Introduction from Chair



I am pleased to commend this Annual Report at the end of a Municipal year that has been full of challenges.

It has been a successful year with the Committee demonstrating its proactive and positive contribution to the work of the administration and its assistance to the Executive in acting as a '*critical friend*'.

With the prospect of even tighter curbs on Local Government spending in the future, the Committee will continue to have a high profile role and the scrutiny of our partners' performance and the monitoring of the impact of budget cuts will feature predominantly in the Committee's future work programme.

Pre-decision scrutiny of matters identified in the Council's Forward Plan and the streamlining of agenda items has led to effective and robust debate in the Chamber and with support from my Vice-Chair, Spokesperson and Democratic Services Team I am committed to building on these strengths and enhancing the scrutiny function for the forthcoming year.

Finally, I would like to thank my fellow Committee Members, the Cabinet, all Councillors who have contributed to the Task and Finish Groups, and the Democratic Services team for their support and co-operation during 2012/13 and I look forward to having the opportunity to '*speak up*' and really '*make a difference*' in 2013/14.

Councillor Jan Lugg  
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2012/13

# The Role of Scrutiny at Gloucester City Council

## Overview and Scrutiny has the powers to:

- Provide a sounding board for the Executive on key policy decisions.
- Hold decision makers to account.
- Challenge and improve performance.
- Support the achievement of value for money.
- Influence decision makers with evidence based recommendations.
- Bring in the views and evidence of stakeholders, users and citizens.

## Successful scrutiny:

- Provides a “critical friend” challenge to executive as well as external agencies.
- Reflects the concerns of the public and community (actively engage the public).
- Takes the lead in scrutinising on behalf of the public (community leadership).
- Makes an impact on the delivery of public services (contribute to performance).

## What the Constitution says

The Council’s Constitution sets out that the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will:-

- (a) co-ordinate, champion and lead on the scrutiny of Council and Executive decisions;
- (b) have all of the functions, powers and duties conferred by Section 21 of the Local Government Act 2000(as amended);
- (c) have all the powers and functions, powers and duties conferred by Section 19 of the Police and Justice Act 2006 and to act as the Council’s Crime and Disorder Committee;
- (d) determine the allocation of work in the event that the scope of the subject matter of a scrutiny study or investigation overlaps the role of more than one Task and Finish Group;
- (e) review the operation of the scrutiny process and work programmes of the Overview and Scrutiny Task and Finish Groups and inform and advise Council in relation to priorities and the allocation of resources;
- (f) oversee and review the resources, support, training and development of Overview and Scrutiny Members;
- (g) develop a positive “critical friend” approach to the role of scrutiny of the Council and Community issues;
- (h) provide and co-ordinate the input to an annual report to Full Council on such issues or topics as the Committee sees fit;
- (i) give consideration to the management of matters called in for review under paragraph 14 of the Overview & Scrutiny Rules;
- (j) give consideration to matters referred to it by the Councillors’ Call for Action;

- (k) review and scrutinise the work of the Executive;
- (l) review and scrutinise the content of the Forward Plan;
- (m) review and scrutinise the policies and proposed policies of the Council;
- (n) consider any matters which affect the authority, the City of Gloucester (or part of it) or its inhabitants (or some of them).

### **'Call In' Meetings**

The Council's Constitution sets out the rights of Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members to 'call in' a Cabinet decision if they feel it has not been made in accordance with principles set out in Article 13. The 'call in' procedure sometimes necessitates the convening of a special meeting to consider the matter unless the next programmed meeting falls within the deadlines set in the Council's constitution.

In 2012/13 there were no 'call in' requests made.

### **The Centre for Public Scrutiny has established four principles of effective scrutiny:-**

- Provides 'critical friend' challenge to executive policy-makers and decision-makers.
- Enables the voice and concerns of the public.
- Is carried out by 'independent minded governors who lead and own the scrutiny process.
- Drives improvement in public services.

# Highlights of the Year

## **Improved agenda management**

This year has seen a shift change from holding 'Cabinet Question Time' to an approach where there has been early engagement between the Committee and the Executive in order for Overview and Scrutiny Members to be able to influence policy and key decisions made by the Executive. There have been no 'call-ins' this year, which demonstrates the improvements in Scrutiny's early involvement in the Cabinet decision making process.

The Committee has also limited its agenda to 3-4 substantive items to enable meaningful and constructive debate on matters. This streamlining of the agenda, in consultation with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Spokesperson, has led to positive outcomes for the Committee and the development of more effective and robust scrutiny.

The Committee has taken part in consultations which are evidenced later in the document.

## **Spotlight on our partners' performance**

The Committee views scrutiny of the performance of the City Council's partnering bodies as an important part of its work.

In 2012/13 presentations were received from the Chief Executives of Aspire and Gloucester City Homes where Members took the opportunity to question them in depth about their current performance and plans for the future. Members were satisfied with the performance levels of both organisations and will receive an update in 2013/14.

Amey (Enterprise), the Council's Streetcare partner, provoked a lively debate when they attended an Overview and Scrutiny Committee in December 2012 and the Committee was able to make an important decision to support a recommendation for an improved grass cutting regime. As a result of this, the grass cutting regime has been changed.

Inevitably, with the pressure of budget cuts imposed on our partners this year, scrutiny of their performance will continue to be in the spotlight and this has been factored into the work programme for next year.

## **Watching the pennies – Budget Scrutiny in action**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee plays an important role in examining the Cabinet's budget proposals. Following a review of the process by a Task and Finish Group in 2010/11, recommendations were made which improved the Committee's involvement. The draft budget is now scrutinised at an early stage with Cabinet Members being invited to present their respective elements of the budget to the Committee.

In 2012/13, the Committee considered the budget at two sessions when the opportunity was taken to robustly question the Cabinet Members on their respective portfolios. The views of the Committee were taken into account and reported to Full Council when the draft budget was considered.

# Scrutiny in Action

## Introduction

The overview and scrutiny function is a central element of the Council's aims and objectives and a key part of the democratic process. The Overview and Scrutiny Committee meets in public to fulfil its role to hold the Executive to account against the background of the administration's stated purpose, aims and objectives. However, the guiding principle for its work is that it should make a *proactive* and *positive* contribution to the development of policy and the discharge of the Council's function. Examples of 'scrutiny in action' are listed below. Please note that this is not an exhaustive list of the Committee's work, but it gives a flavour of the highlights of Members' achievements.

## Review of Shopmobility Service

Positive engagement by the Committee in July 2012 led to endorsement of the Executive's proposal to adopt an in-house business focused service as the Shopmobility service model for progression.

## Options for City Centre Closed Circuit Television System

In September 2012 the Committee examined options for updating the City's ageing CCTV system. There was a robust debate which culminated in Members being able to endorse one of the options to the Executive and to recommend adjustments to revenue and capital budgets.

## Outcomes of the Voluntary and Community Sector Grants for the year 2011/12

The Committee demonstrated its proactive behaviour when it considered a report which evidenced the outcomes achieved against community grants awarded in 2011/12. After a full debate, Members agreed three recommendations to the Executive, one of which proposed that Ward Councillors, with their specialist knowledge of their district, be invited to provide feedback on groups who had received funding within their Wards. All these recommendations were adopted by the Executive.

## **Proposed Traffic Restrictions in Pedestrianised areas/Gloucester City Centre Gate Streets**

In February 2013 the Committee showed its commitment to tackling community concerns by commenting on a report by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture on proposed traffic restrictions in the gate streets and pedestrianized areas. This resulted in Members recommending to the Executive that there should be a short transitional period to allow compliance with Traffic Regulation orders; exemptions to the orders should be kept to a minimum and that any flouting of the Orders should be actively enforced.

## **Car Club**

In 2012/13 the Committee continued its close scrutiny of the performance of the City Council's Car Club with in-depth analysis on two occasions. Members had been disappointed with the take-up of the scheme which had been financed using Section 106 monies and had expressed concerns to the Executive about its future. As a direct result of the Committee's proactive approach and close scrutiny, the Executive has agreed to recommend termination of the contract using a three year break clause.



# **Speaking Up – Scrutiny’s part in consultation**

## **Introduction**

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee has an important part to play in contributing to consultations which can range from in depth examination of new Government legislation, to looking at new and revised Council strategies and policies. Aside from this, the Committee is always happy to review its partners’ and stakeholders’ work as evidenced by a visit from the Director of Public Health when Members were encouraged to comment on a strategy ‘Your Health, Your Care’ which was submitted as part of a presentation on the Director of Public Health’s annual report. Highlights of consultation work in 2012/13 are detailed below.

## **Draft Tenancy Strategy**

The Committee considered a report by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure which outlined a framework for the use of flexible tenancies and social housing with the aim of assisting the Council to make better use of its housing stock. Members robustly debated the proposals which they believed had wide-reaching implications for tenants. As a result of the debate, the Committee was able to recommend to the Executive that they considered a more joined up, County-wide approach to the discharge of the Council’s homelessness responsibilities. This was incorporated into the final draft document approved by Full Council in November 2012.

## **Revision of Evening Economy Action Plan**

In November 2012 the Committee received a presentation from the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture where Members were asked to submit ideas for the improvement of the evening economy in Gloucester which would be subsequently included in a revised action plan. Members examined the document in detail and requested that the importance of cleaning, lighting and the harmonisation of parking regimes be reflected in the document. These suggestions were adopted by the Cabinet Member. Another successful outcome from this meeting was the adoption of the Evening Economy as a Task and Finish Group topic which is evidenced later in this report.

## **Changes to Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings Scheme**

One of the most difficult and controversial consultations the Committee was involved in related to a report presented by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure which set out proposed changes to the Gloucestershire Homeseeker Choice Based Lettings Scheme. The Council had been asked to contribute to a county-wide policy which had to be adopted by all six districts in Gloucestershire to ensure parity. The Committee explored sensitive and controversial issues including the so-called 'bedroom tax' and the impact on resources of applications being received from outside the City because of Gloucester's cheaper housing costs. At the conclusion of the debate, Members recognised the difficulty of participating in a consultation whilst being constrained by benefit law and legislation. The Committee's comments have been incorporated into the final draft of the scheme which is due to go to Full Council in July 2013.

## **Public Open Space Strategy**

In March 2013 the Committee was a consultee on a Public Open Space Strategy Draft which set out how Gloucester planned to protect, manage, and enhance its open spaces over the next five years. Members were able to suggest matters that needed further highlight or clarification for inclusion in the draft strategy. These items have since been included in the latest draft of the Public Open Space Strategy.

# **Task and Finish Group Activity**

## **Introduction**

Task and Finish Groups are set up to look at issues in detail, gather evidence, and talk to witnesses and service users. Site visits are also carried out where appropriate. A one page scoping document sets the scene for the Group's work. The Group's conclusions are documented in a report for the Executive (Cabinet) which details its findings and recommendations.

## **Cabinet Response to Dog Fouling Task and Finish Group findings (2011/12)**

In July 2012 the Committee received Cabinet's response to the findings of the Dog Fouling Task and Finish Group whose report in March of that year had produced 8 recommendations. All these recommendations were adopted by Cabinet and led to improved reporting and enforcement actions. The Cabinet Member for the Environment thanked the Committee for producing the report. The success of these actions is likely to be monitored in the future.

## **Consultation with Members on Task and Finish Group Topics for 2012/13**

In October 2012 all Gloucester City Councillors were consulted upon for suggested topics for Task and Finish Groups. This resulted in 8 ideas being put forward which were all discussed at the November 2012 meeting, with 2 topics being eventually chosen (as detailed below) with Task and Finish Group Members being ratified by the Committee in December 2012.

## **Recycling and Bulky Items Task and Finish Group**

Membership: Councillor Field (Chair), Councillor Haigh, Councillor Taylor

Ambitions for the review (identified in the scoping document):-

- To increase recycling percentages
- To make recycling more accessible to the community

As part of its work, the Group has met with the following witnesses:-

- Amey (Enterprise) – Council's streetcare partner
- Furniture Recycling Project
- Cabinet Member for the Environment
- County Council Waste Unit team

- Stroud District Council's Public Space Manager

The Group will be summarising its findings in a report scheduled for completion in August 2013.

### **Evening Economy Task and Finish Group**

Membership: Councillor Chatterton (Chair), Councillor Gravells, Councillor Taylor

Ambitions for the review (identified in the scoping document)

- To target specific groups to discover what they would be seeking in order to encourage them into the City Centre and Docks.
- To look at ways of linking the evening economy offer in the Quays and the City Centre.
- To 'talk up' the City.
- To identify a lead organisation to have overall co-ordination of existing Evening Economy Groups.

As part of its work, the Group has met with the following witnesses:-

- Director of Gloucester Quays.
- Chief Executive of Marketing Gloucester.
- Dean of Gloucester.
- Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture.
- Council Champion for the Evening Economy.
- A representative from the Hackney Carriage Trade.

There has also been engagement with the public following a press release asking what the over 30's would like to see on an evening out in Gloucester and the Chair of the Group gave an interview on BBC Radio Gloucestershire's 'Drive Time' programme.

The Group will be summarising its findings in a report scheduled for completion by August 2013.

# The Resources of Scrutiny

## **Budget**

The Committee does not have its own dedicated budget and its work is funded from the Democratic Services team's budget.

## **Officer Support**

Support is provided by Democratic Services, predominantly by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny Support) under the direction of the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager.

## **Professional Advice**

The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) provides the Members and Officers with a wealth of information including examples of best practice and case studies etc. for task and finish groups.

## **Networking**

The Gloucestershire Scrutiny Group provides an opportunity for Scrutiny Chairs and Officers to meet others within the County in order to discuss respective workloads and share information.

## **Member Training**

As previously reported, in 2012/13 Members received training from Graham Russell of South West Councils. This session was rated highly by the 10 Committee Members who attended.

Additionally, the Chair received training on Scrutiny chairing skills at the University of Birmingham in July 2012 which she found to be extremely interesting and relevant to her role.

## **Looking Ahead**

In the new Municipal year 2013/14 we are looking forward to having 4 new faces on the Committee who will need training and support to fulfil their roles. These are Councillors Llewellyn, Williams, Toleman and Wilson. Councillors Llewellyn and Williams as former Cabinet Members will have experience of the overview and scrutiny function and will no doubt enjoy scrutinising the new Executive from the other side of the fence.

## Meetings held in 2012/13

<b>Nature of Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Ordinary	11 June 2012
Ordinary	2 July 2012
Ordinary	10 September 2012
Ordinary	15 October 2012
Ordinary	12 November 2012
Budget (Forecast)	3 December 2012
Ordinary	10 December 2012
Budget (Proposals)	14 January 2013
Ordinary	4 February 2013
Ordinary	4 March 2013

### Members' Overview and Scrutiny Attendance Record for 2012/13

<b>Name</b>	<b>Meetings attended</b>
Councillor Janet Lugg (Chair)	10
Councillor Jim Beeley (Vice-Chair)	9
Councillor Tarren Randle (Spokesperson)	9
Councillor Kate Haigh	9
Councillor Andrew Gravells	8
Councillor Susan Witts	10
Councillor Sebastian Field	6
Councillor Gerald Dee	10
Councillor Jim Porter	3
Councillor Gordon Taylor	9
Councillor Said Hansdot	8
Councillor Fred Wood	9
Councillor Saj Patel	8
Councillor Anna Mozol	4
Councillor Chris Chatterton	10

## Meet The Overview and Scrutiny Committee Members 2012/13



**Councillor Janet Lugg  
Chair**



**Councillor Jim Beeley  
Vice-Chair**



**Councillor Tarren Randle  
Spokesperson**



Councillor Kate Haigh



Councillor Andrew Gravells



Councillor Susan Witts



Councillor Sebastian Field



Councillor Gerald Dee



Councillor Jim Porter



Councillor Gordon Taylor



Councillor Said Hansdot



Councillor Fred Wood



Councillor Saj Patel



Councillor Anna Mozol



Councillor Chris Chatterton