

Gloucester City Council

**ANNUAL REPORT
OF THE
OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY
COMMITTEE
2014-15**



**Published by Democratic Services
June 2015**

CONTENTS

	Page No.
Introduction from the Chair	2
Meet the Members	3
How Scrutiny works at Gloucester City Council	4
The Committee's Resources	8
Highlights of the Year	9
Performance Monitoring	14
Balancing the Books	15
Speaking Up – Scrutiny's role in Consultation	16
Task and Finish Group Activity	18
Challenges for 2015/16	21
Meeting statistics	22

INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

I am delighted to present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report on its activities in 2014-15.

It has been a year of challenges and pressures on the resources and finances of local government and the Committee has played its part in monitoring and scrutinising the Council's activities.



The Committee has had a full and varied work programme including two special events which were held during the year namely, a 'Question Time' styled panel and a workshop with students.

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 Officer for their support and co-operation during 2014-15

*Councillor Jan Lugg
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2014-15*

MEET THE MEMBERS



Councillor Janet Lugg
Chair



Councillor Susan Witts
Vice-Chair



Councillor Andrew Gravells
Spokesperson



Councillor Kate Haigh



Councillor Jim Beeley



Councillor Andy Lewis



Councillor Sebastian Field



Councillor Gerald Dee



Councillor Nigel Hanman



Councillor Gordon Taylor



Councillor Said Hansdot



Councillor Norman Ravenhill



Councillor Paul Toleman



Councillor Declan Wilson



Councillor Terry Pullen

HOW SCRUTINY WORKS AT GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny has the powers to:

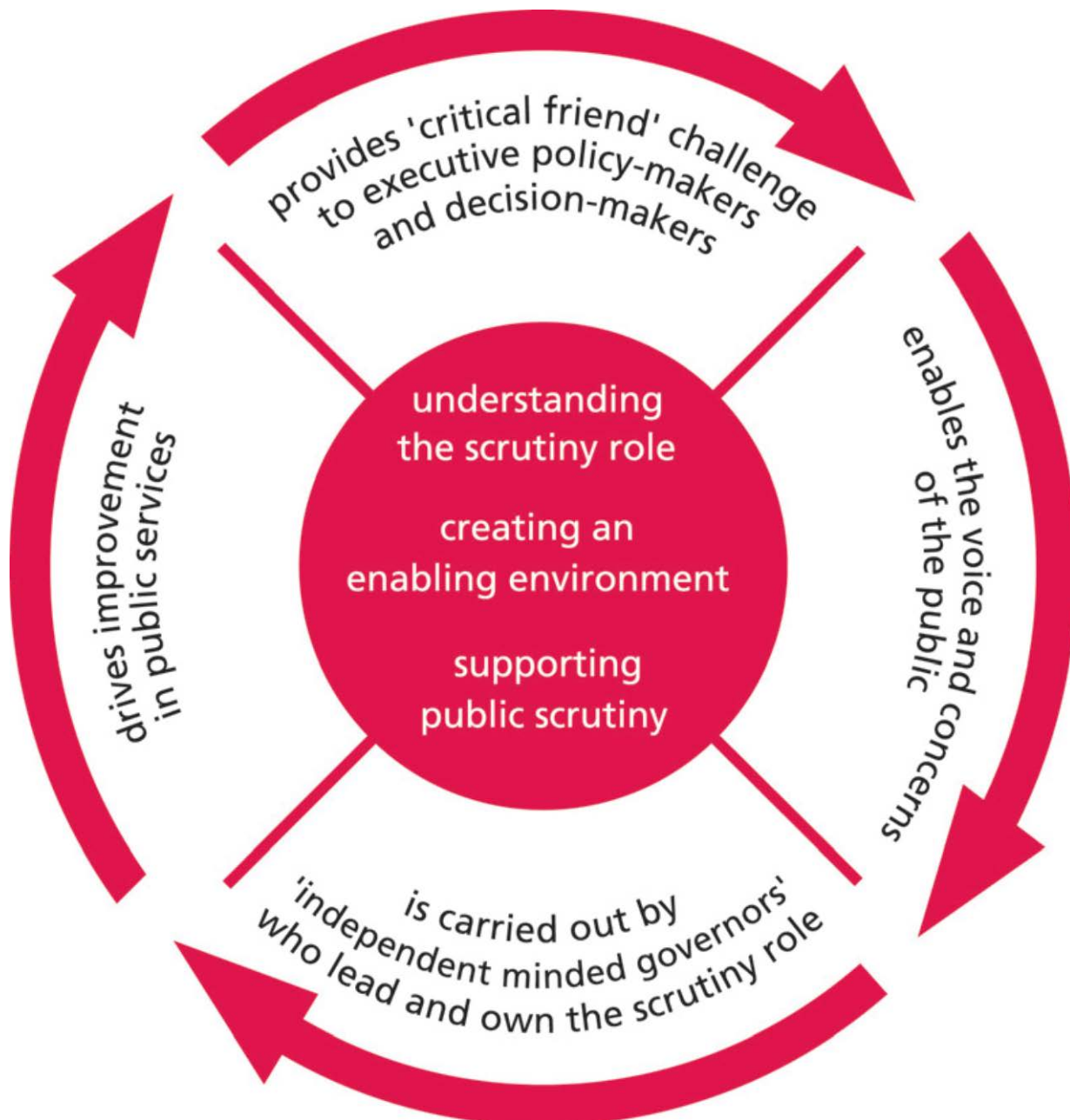
- Provide a sounding board for the Cabinet on key policy decisions.
- Hold decision makers to account.
- Challenge and improve performance.
- Support the achievement of value for money.
- Influence decision makers with evidence based recommendations.
- Bring in the views and evidence of stakeholders,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

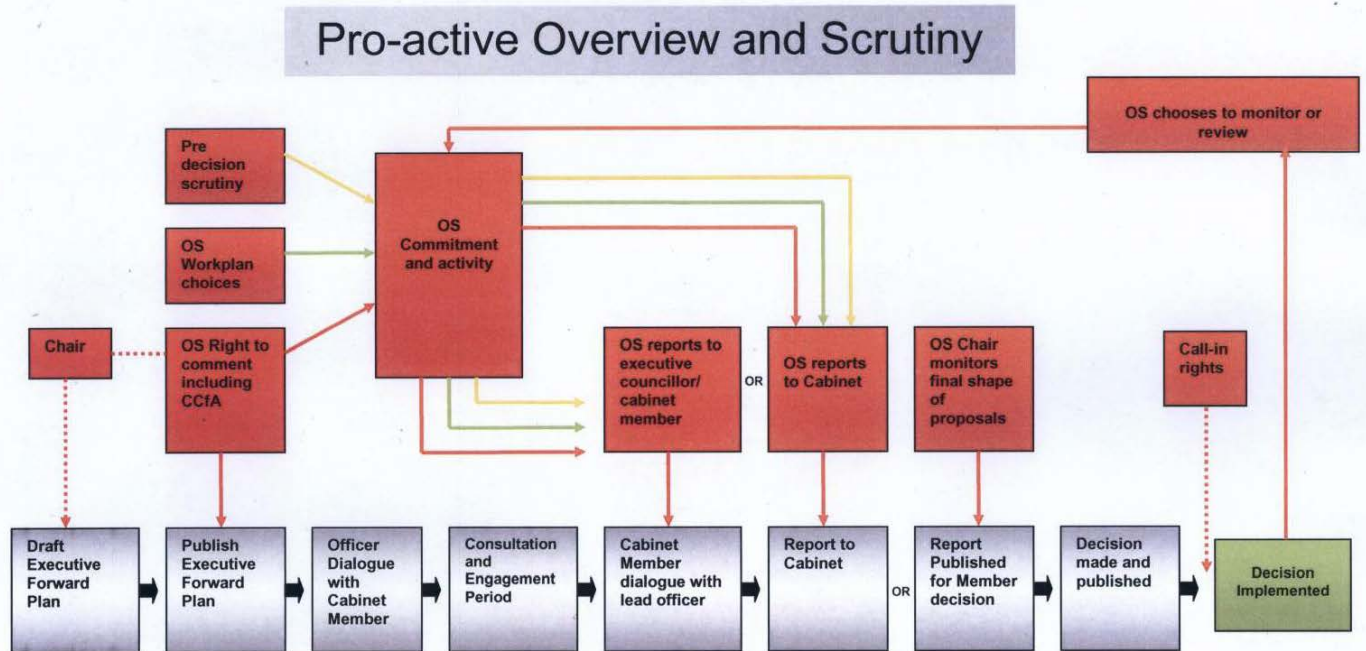


Successful scrutiny:-

- Provides a “critical friend” challenge to executive as well as external agencies.
- Reflects the concerns of the public and community (actively engage with 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).
- Makes a difference!

Successful scrutiny 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 of holding the Cabinet 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.





The Committee's Work Programme

There is one Overview and Scrutiny Committee which meets monthly. The agenda usually comprises no more than 3-4 substantive items to enable meaningful and constructive debate on matters. Agenda items are taken from the Cabinet Forward Plan and the Scrutiny Work Programme. The Committee also has a 'rolling' work programme of items which crop up at specific times of the year. Cabinet Members are invited to attend for their respective items. The Committee often acts as a consultee on various strategies as is evidenced later in this report. Task and Finish Group topics are selected following discussion by the Committee and a one page scoping document is produced clearly setting out the aims and objectives of the review.

'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 decision-making principles set out in Article 12 of the Constitution. The 'call in' procedure may result in 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 2014-15 there was no exercise of the 'call in' procedure.

What does the City Council's Constitution says about the role of Overview and Scrutiny?

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).

THE COMMITTEE'S RESOURCES

Officer Support and Professional Advice

Support is provided by the Democratic Services Officer (Scrutiny Support) under the direction of the Democratic and Electoral Services Manager. The DSO works closely with the Chair, Vice-Chair and Spokesperson and takes a proactive role in managing the Committee's work programme. The Centre for Public Scrutiny (CfPS) is regarded as a focal reference point for professional advice, case studies and tips for best practice.

Networking

The Gloucestershire Scrutiny Group meets twice a year and provides an opportunity for Scrutiny Chairs and Officers to meet others within the County in order to discuss respective workloads and share information. Additionally, the Democratic Services Officer has a good relationship with the County Council's Democratic Services Team.

Budget

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

Member Training

In March 2015, the Committee received a training session on 'Making Task and Finish Groups Effective'. The training was delivered by Simon Harper and Stephen Bace from the County Council's Democratic Services Team. The session reflected on successful studies carried out by task and finish groups at the County Council and stressed the importance of focusing on key issues. The training was well received and thought provoking.



HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Introduction

2014-15 has been a challenging and productive year for the Committee. In addition to the normal work programme items, consultations, task and finish groups and items selected by the Committee for investigation, the Committee held 2 special events which are detailed below.

‘Question Time’ Panel – October 2014

The Committee chose to suspend its normal business to hold a ‘Question Time’ style event with the heads of the 3 main educational establishments supporting the City:-

- Gloucestershire College
- University of Gloucestershire
- Hartpury College

On this occasion the Committee was pleased to welcome the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure to join the Committee around the table. The session was held in public with all Councillors being invited and was publicised in the local media.



Panel Members were asked the following group questions:-

1. *What is unique about the courses you offer?*
2. *How does your organisation contribute towards the economic development of Gloucester?*
3. *What proportion of graduates stay within the local economy and what initiatives are taken to retain that knowledge within the local area?*
4. *What is your marketing strategy?*
5. *How do you attract students from some of the poorer pockets of the City?*
6. *Do you visit local schools to promote your organisation?*
7. *How do you encourage students with special needs?*



The Committee also asked each Panel Member individual questions which were of direct relevance to their organisation.

The event concluded with the Panel Members turning the table on the Councillors and asking them questions.

The session was extremely successful and identified several areas where the City Council and the educational institutions could work together for mutual benefit including:-

- Suggestion that vacant premises in the City Centre could be rented by the educational establishments to showcase their projects.
- Agreement that the City Council and students would work together to find a student specific venue for socialising where students would feel safe and comfortable.
- Identification of the need for a possible student quarter with hotel and conference facilities.

One of the outcomes from the meeting was the decision to hold a workshop with students from the organisations and this was the second event which the Committee hosted during the year.

Workshop with Students – November 2014

Leading on from the success of the ‘Question Time’ panel, the Democratic Services Officer organised an informal workshop with students from the major educational establishments serving the City. The session was held in private and the Cabinet’s Champion of the Evening Economy joined two Overview and Scrutiny Members and key Officers around the table.

The theme of the workshop was:-

What can the City Council do to provide a student specific venue for socialising and how can the City attract students to live in Gloucester and to enjoy the evening economy?



The workshop was broken down into the following themes:-

- Nightlife
- Safety
- Economy
- Heritage
- Sports
- Heritage
- Student Events
- Accommodation

The event was extremely successful and achieved positive outcomes by opening up networking opportunities for the various students and giving Council Officers an insight into what was important to the students.

There has been follow up work since the workshop involving the Economic Development Team as follows:-



- A productive meeting was held with the Student Union Chief Executive and Communications Manager with the aim of creating a better working relationship between the University and the City Council.
- The Gloucester Guildhall plans to host a 'Freshers Fortnight' event.
- The possibility of holding regular 'Student Nights' at the Guildhall will be explored.
- Work placement opportunities for students at the Guildhall will be publicised to students.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee will shortly receive an update on actions undertaken since the workshop.

PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Challenge, Change, Improve!

The Committee views scrutiny of the performance of the City Council's partnering bodies and stakeholders as an important part of its work. Reduced financial resources continue to put pressure on our partners as they strive to meet their performance targets whilst providing a good service to the residents of Gloucester.



Spotlight on Amey



The Committee reviewed the performance of Amey, the Council's streetcare partner, on two occasions in 2014. Streetcare is such a highly visible service that it always prompts intense debate from Members.

The streetcare contract is also monitored by the Strategic Streetcare Partnership which is chaired by the Cabinet Member for Environment.

Following a meeting between the Lead Members of Overview and Scrutiny and the Strategic Streetcare Partnership in January 2015, the roles of the two bodies were discussed as there were concerns about possible duplication in the scrutiny of the service. As a result of the meeting it was agreed that the Strategic Streetcare Partnership would continue to monitor Amey's performance on a quarterly basis and that Overview and Scrutiny Committee would receive an annual report in June of each year on the activities of the Partnership including the Amey service plan and a presentation by Amey.

Both parties agreed this was a successful outcome and that there was now clarity on their respective roles.



Civica UK Limited - Revenues and Benefits Partnership

In July 2014, the Committee received an annual update on the Gloucester City Council Revenues and Benefits Partnership with Civica. The Committee reviewed the service's low error rate, customer ease of access, and efficiencies which had been introduced to streamline the service. The Committee was pleased to be able to place on record its satisfaction with the Partnership's performance.



Civica UK Limited - IT Partnership

Gloucester City Council entered into a contract with Civica UK Limited for the delivery of IT services in May 2014. In July 2014, the Committee received a presentation from the IT Outsourcing Director of Civica on progress on the new partnership and future plans and priorities. Members noted the public's expectation of increased digital/interactive services. The Committee will continue to monitor the partnership on an annual basis.

Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust

In November 2014 the Committee examined the performance of the Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust. Members were also presented with a 5 year business plan for the Trust. The Committee was pleased to note that despite a difficult trading year the Trust continued to perform well. During the presentation the Committee was briefed on how the Trust attracted a client base from areas of deprivation in the City. Members were pleased to note the Trust's charitable aims and the benefits the Trust brought to the City.

Gloucester City Homes

The Committee considered the performance of Gloucester City Homes in November 2014. At this meeting the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure informed the Committee that this would be the last report in this particular format pending the transfer of the 4,800 homes to a housing association with Gloucester City Homes acting as the new landlord. Members commended Gloucester City Homes for its excellent performance and positive engagement with the community.



BALANCING THE BOOKS

Budget Monitoring



Overview and Scrutiny Committee carries out financial monitoring on a quarterly basis looking at the City Council's budget variances, year-end forecasts, and progress made against agreed savings targets. This is an important part of the Committee's annual work programme and helps to keep the City's finances on track.

Consultation on the budget

In December 2014 the Committee welcomed all the Cabinet Members to a meeting set aside for consideration of the City Council's draft money plan for 2015/20 and budget proposals for consultation for the year 2015/16.

Each Cabinet Member presented their portfolio in turn against a background of questions pre-set by the Committee.

During their presentations, the Cabinet Members outlined the savings achieved to date and demonstrated how further savings would be achieved by reductions in partnership costs, increased efficiencies and service transformations.

The Committee robustly questioned the Cabinet Members on their proposals for achieving savings and finding new income streams.



SPEAKING UP – SCRUTINY’S ROLE 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. Highlights of consultation work in 2014-15 are detailed below.

Allotments Strategy



In July 2014, the Committee examined a draft allotments strategy presented by the Cabinet Member for Environment which set out how the City Council intended to manage its allotment holding over coming years. Members discussed a number of matters arising from the strategy including plans to introduce properly constituted allotment associations and charging regimes.

Gloucester City Centre Strategy 2015-19

In January 2015, the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture sought the Committee’s input to the creation of a co-ordinated City Centre Strategy for Gloucester. The document included 7 strategic priorities and key actions which would be shared with stakeholders as part of a wider consultation exercise. The Committee engaged in a lively debate with the Cabinet Member, particularly concerning retail aspirations for the City.

Regeneration and Economic Development Strategy

Also in January 2015, the Committee appraised a draft 5 year regeneration and economic strategy presented by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture. The strategy identified 6 key regeneration and economic development objectives which would be delivered over the 5 years. During the meeting the Committee discussed plans for the regeneration of Blackfriars scheme, with one of the Members suggesting that the possibility of bringing the Dominican library to Blackfriars as a tourist attraction should be revisited.



Housing Strategy

In February 2015, the Committee welcomed the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure when Members examined the final draft of the Council's Housing Strategy following consultation with stakeholders. The Committee was pleased to endorse the strategy as a comprehensive guide to anyone living outside the City. Members suggested that a summary document would be useful to emphasise the key objectives of the strategy.



Review of Cultural Services

Also in February 2015, the Committee considered a review of cultural services presented by the Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Culture. The review represented the findings of Michael + Partners (consultants) and had been produced in conjunction with a cross-Member and Officer working group. A Councillor from the working group was also in attendance to answer questions from the Committee. Members made constructive suggestions regarding signage and lighting for the Guildhall and were pleased to note that there was a commitment to delivering the recommendations in the report as quickly as possible.

Gloucester City Markets Strategy



In March 2015, the Committee deliberated on a 5 year draft markets strategy and action plan which also sought endorsement for the investigations of options for a new ground floor indoor market. The document prompted a lengthy debate during which the Committee discussed possible locations for a new indoor market and matters relating to the Farmers' Market and specialist markets which were held from time to time.

A recommendation arising from the meeting was for the current location of the indoor market to be better signposted. All the Committee acknowledged that vibrant markets played an important part in the retail offer in the City.

TASK AND FINISH GROUP ACTIVITY

Introduction

Task and Finish Groups are set up to look at issues in detail which cannot be dealt with in any other way such as holding a workshop or an intensive day session. The Task and Finish Group gathers evidence by talking to witnesses and service users. Site visits are also carried out where appropriate.

Any Councillor can suggest a topic for a Task and Finish Group.

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee chooses which subject(s) they wish to investigate

A one page scoping document sets the scene for the Group's work. At the end of the study, the Group's conclusions are documented in a report for the Cabinet which details its findings and recommendations.

In 2014-15 the Committee ran two Task and Finish Groups:-

Management of Parcels of Unadopted Green Land (concluded in March 2015)

Membership: Councillor Haigh (Chair), Councillor Wilson, Councillor Noakes, plus Councillor Randle (substitute Member for Councillor Noakes)

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

To identify where these unadopted parcels of land exist and to look at options for dealing with them, both historically and moving forward. The review will also cover areas near to watercourses.

Recommendations from the review:-

Legacy Issues

1. It is recommended that legacy issues be tackled by identifying land ownership details in the first instance.
2. It is recommended that developers be lobbied.
3. It is recommended that residents be written to where land is found to be in private ownership.

4. It is recommended that community clean-ups be encouraged, and that these should involve Amey, the County Council and Gloucester City Homes, where appropriate.
5. It is recommended that an approach be adopted to residents of '*you blitz it and we might adopt it*' provided the advice of Council Officers is followed.
6. It is recommended that where appropriate, residents are able to take ownership of odd pieces of land which are of no value or use to the City Council to ensure that the land is maintained.
7. It is recommended that potentially unsafe areas be tackled by Amey on an emergency case by case basis.

Moving Forward

1. It is recommended that the Council should draft a policy for dealing with unadopted land.
2. It is recommended that Planning Officers should look at the most appropriate means of ensuring small areas of unadopted land do not slip through the net, such as using a 'checklist'.
3. It is recommended that developers should be encouraged to maintain unadopted land that they are responsible for.

Other Recommendations

1. It is recommended that information be placed on the Council's website advising residents of their options for dealing with overgrown areas of land.
2. It is recommended that assistance for community groups both in terms of financial help through funding, and through mentoring by other established voluntary groups, be publicised on the Council's website.
3. It is recommended that Councillors be informed of the City Council's intranet mapping system and how to manipulate it, subject to access levels being preset.

The report was presented to Cabinet on 25 March 2015, when it was well received. Monitoring of the report's recommendations will take place in six months' time.



The second Task and Finish Group is still ongoing following a break in its activity to allow Officers to carry out a series of inspections.

Proposed Actions to Improve Housing Conditions in the Private Rented Sector

Membership: Councillor Smith (Chair), Councillor Gravells, Councillor Beeley

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

- ***To agree an action plan to implement proactive programmes intended to improve the worst privately rented accommodation in HMOs.***
- ***To agree how these improvements can be sustained into the future.***
- ***To identify if there is a case for additional licensing schemes.***



Overview and Scrutiny Committee chose this study as a direct result of their interest in the subject following the presentation of a report on the housing conditions in the private rented sector by the Cabinet Member for Housing, Health and Leisure in June 2014.

Recommendations from the study will be published in next year's Annual Report.

CHALLENGES FOR 2015-16

Looking Ahead

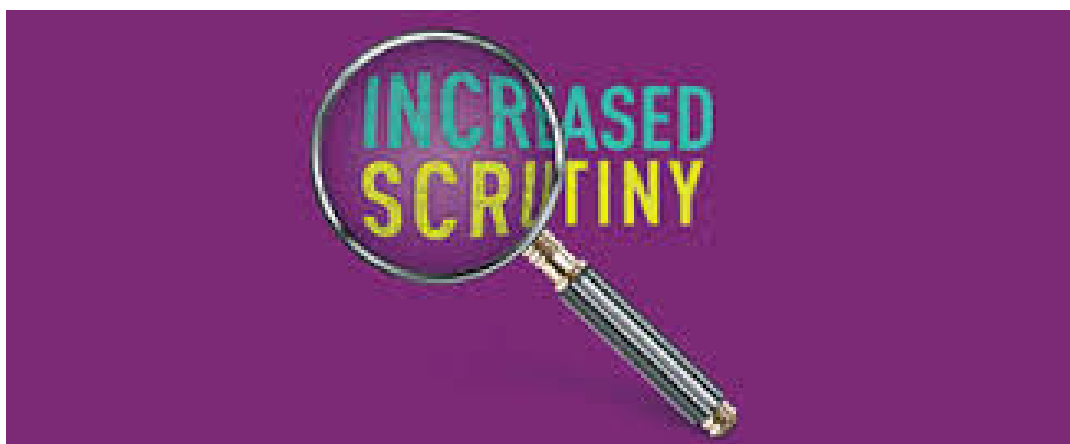
In the municipal year 2015-16 the Committee welcomes 4 new Members to the Committee and a new Vice-Chair and Spokesperson.

Following the local elections on 7 May 2015, the Conservative group hold a majority of seats on the Council and this means that the role of scrutiny is more important than ever.

The Committee's Work Programme is already filling up for the year and in addition to its rolling programme of work the Committee will be selecting new task and finish group topics.

There will continue to be robust and rigorous examination of the Council's partners and other stakeholders and a varied programme of work during the year.

The Democratic Services Officer is working on a Task and Finish Group protocol which will give Members and Officers a better understanding of the process and will also help to ensure that the implementation of recommendations is monitored. There are also plans to produce an Overview and Scrutiny handbook in the new municipal year. Opportunities will also be explored to increase public and stakeholder engagement with scrutiny.



OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY MEETINGS HELD IN 2014-15 AND MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD

Nature of Meeting	Date
Ordinary business	23 June 2014
Ordinary business	21 July 2014
Ordinary business	15 September 2014
Question Time Panel	13 October 2014
Ordinary business	10 November 2014
Budget proposals and consultation	1 December 2014
Ordinary business	8 December 2014
Ordinary business	26 January 2015
Ordinary business	23 February 2015
Ordinary business	23 March 2015

Name of Councillor	Meetings attended (out of a maximum of 10)
Councillor Janet Lugg (Chair)	10
Councillor Susan Witts (Vice-Chair)	10
Councillor Andrew Gravells (Spokesperson)	8
Councillor Kate Haigh	10
Councillor Nigel Hanman	8
Councillor Andrew Lewis	7
Councillor Declan Wilson	10
Councillor Norman Ravenhill	8
Councillor Sebastian Field	8
Councillor Gerald Dee	7
Councillor Gordon Taylor	10
Councillor Jim Beeley	6
Councillor Said Hansdot	7
Councillor Paul Toleman	10
Councillor Terry Pullen	9

**DELIVERED
BY SCRUTINY**

Gloucester
City Council