

Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Annual Report 2015-16



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INTRODUCTION FROM THE CHAIR

I am delighted to present the Overview and Scrutiny Committee's report on its activities in 2015-16.

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 during the year which has included the conclusion of two task and finish groups; a workshop to explore the impact of the sales of high strength alcohol; and the call-in of a Cabinet decision.

I am very proud to report that the Centre for Public Scrutiny, the leading national body for promoting and supporting excellence in governance and scrutiny, has commended the [work](#) of the Task and Finish Group on improving housing conditions in the private rented sector. This national recognition highlights the importance of the work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

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 2015-16.

I wish the new Chair, Vice-Chair and Spokesperson every success in 2016-17.

Councillor Jan Lugg
Chair Overview and Scrutiny Committee 2015-16

MEET THE MEMBERS



Councillor Janet Lugg
Chair



Councillor Neil Hampson
Vice-Chair



Councillor Hannah Norman
Spokesperson



Councillor Kate Haigh



Councillor Jim Beeley



Councillor Andy Lewis



Councillor Andrew Gravells



Councillor Gerald Dee



Councillor Chris Etheridge



Councillor Tarren Randle



Councillor Said Hansdot



Councillor Laura Pearsall



Councillor Paul Toleman



Councillor Sebastian Field



Councillor Susan Witts

SECTION 1 - HOW SCRUTINY WORKS AT GLOUCESTER CITY COUNCIL

Overview and Scrutiny has the powers to:

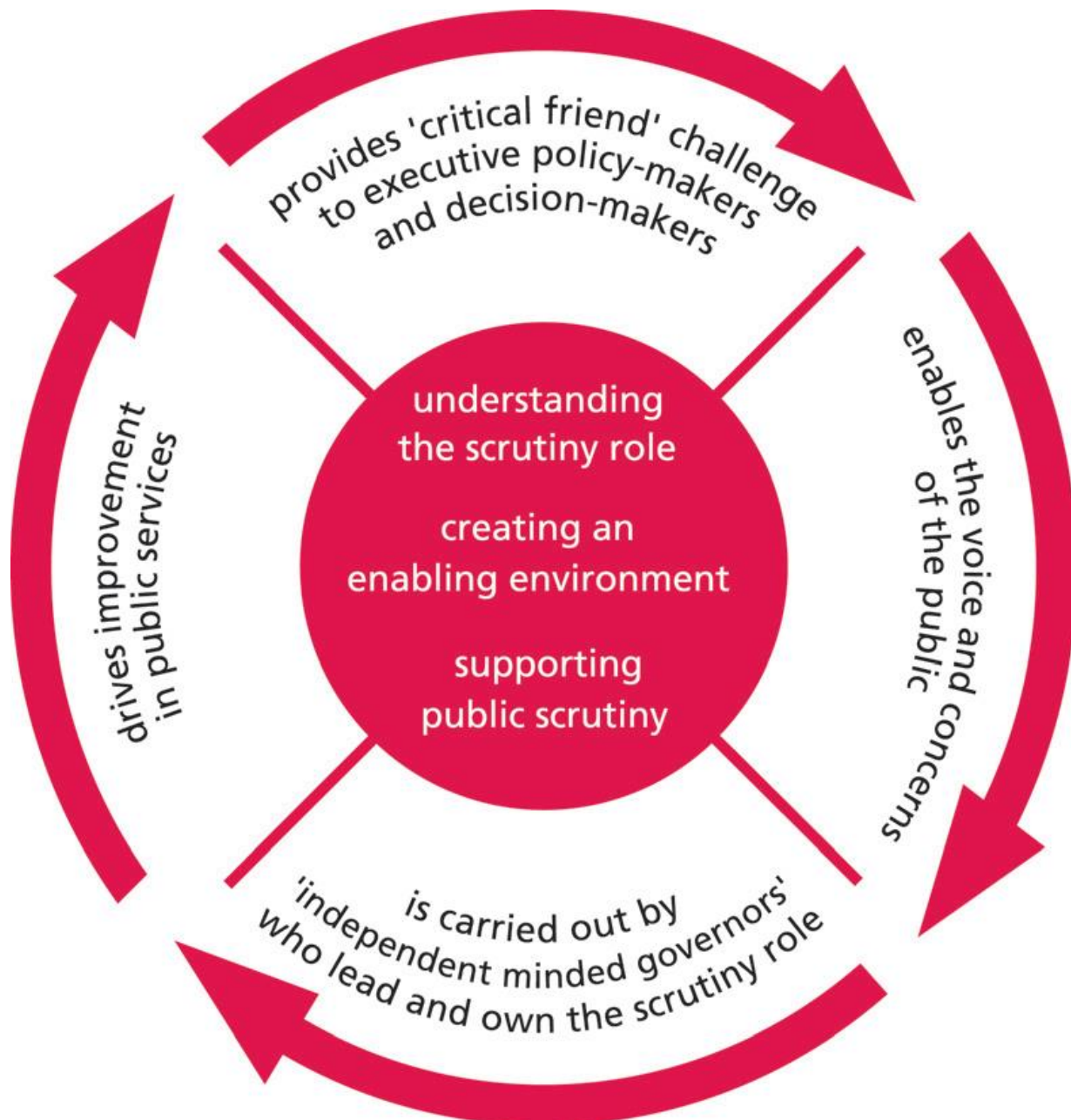
- Provide a sounding board for the Cabinet on key policy decisions.
- Hold decision makers to account.
- Challenge and improve performance.
- Support the achievement of value for money.
- Influence decision makers with evidence based recommendations.
- Bring in the views and evidence of stakeholders,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

Overview and Scrutiny work is Councillor led. In addition to Councillors leading on which subjects they wish to consider in depth through Task and Finish Groups they also set their own work programme which is populated with topics selected from the Cabinet's Forward Plan, matters relating to the Council's priorities and challenges, and issues of importance to local residents. They identify who they want to hear from to inform their work and decide who should attend meetings to present the information. Meetings are held monthly. The agenda usually comprises no more than 3-4 substantive items to enable meaningful and constructive debate on matters.

What Overview and Scrutiny does not do



Overview and Scrutiny does not get involved in minor matters or individual concerns which are not of wider community significance. These need to be addressed through the appropriate service unit, Ward Councillor, or the Portfolio Holder responsible for the issue. Overview and Scrutiny does not deal with individual complaints as these should be addressed through the Council's Complaints Procedure.

'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 2015-16 there was one exercise of the 'call in' procedure which is detailed later in this report.

What 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).



SECTION 2 - HIGHLIGHTS OF THE YEAR

Special Event - Alcohol Workshop

On 22 March 2016, a sub-group of the Committee met with the Licensing Officer from Gloucestershire Police along with City Council Officers to examine the impact of sales of high strength alcohol on the residents of Gloucester.

During the workshop the Group explored various alcohol related matters and considered the reasons why people chose to drink in the street. The Licensing Officer from Gloucestershire Police provided crime 'heat maps' for the City to demonstrate where there were pockets of anti-social behaviour and criminal activity associated with the issues.



The Group then considered what measures the Council, the Police and other partners could take. These included a review of the Council's Licensing Policy Statement; extending the current Public Space Protection Order; attaching relevant conditions when premises licences were granted or reviewed; the possibility of introducing a community alcohol scheme; and engagement with partners, stakeholders and community leaders.

One of the outcomes from the workshop was a suggestion by the Group that this matter should be the topic of a future task and finish group by the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The Committee will consider this idea, along with other suggestions, during the new municipal year.



Public Health Presentation

On 14 September 2015, the Committee received a presentation from the Interim Director of Public Health. The Committee explored the following themes:-

1. The impact of devolution on public health.
2. Young people's mental health issues.
3. The fact that the largest part of the public health grant was spent on dealing with substance and alcohol misuse with clarification given on the decision making process for allocating funds to various issues.
4. Work carried out through GPs on dementia.
5. The LGA's stance on the sale of legal highs and the fact that this was an emerging significant issue. The Committee noted that the Director of Public Health had no legislative powers to close shops.
6. The role of district nurses.
7. The provision of sexual health services.
8. The success of the 'Active Together' initiative.
9. There was a discussion on housing and inequalities with the recognition that health was everyone's issue.
10. How the quality of the service was measured. There was no clinical audit, but the position was monitored on a monthly basis.
11. Members stressed the importance of having a joined up service encompassing mental health and public health and it was acknowledged that there was confusion over roles and responsibilities.
12. There was a suggestion that the University of Gloucestershire should carry out an exercise with 'Active Together' to ensure that the grants were being invested in the most needy communities.



Public Health
is everybody's business

Task and Finish Groups

2015-16 saw the successful conclusion of two Task and Finish Groups, both of which were quite different.

The first Task and Finish Group on actions to improve housing conditions in the private rented sector received national acclaim from the Centre for Public Scrutiny as an example of good scrutiny.

The second Task and Finish Group focused on employment and skills opportunities for young people. As a consequence of the study it is likely that Overview and Scrutiny Committee will do further follow-up work on this topic in 2016-17.

Task and Finish Group Monitoring

Monitoring of the implementation of Task and Finish Group recommendations is an essential part of the Committee's purpose.

In October 2015 the Committee reviewed progress made towards implementing the agreed recommendations on the management of parcels of unadopted green land. The Committee recorded its satisfaction with the progress made.

The Cabinet Member for Regeneration and Economy was robustly challenged in November 2015 when the Committee monitored progress on the Task and Finish Group on the Evening Economy resulting in a request for further monitoring to be carried out in 6 months' time. Another outcome from the debate was the commissioning of a study by Overview and Scrutiny into the impact on health and anti-social behaviour caused by the sale of high strength alcohol. This was later held as a workshop in March 2016.

Rugby World Cup



All eyes were on Gloucester in September 2015 when Kingsholm Stadium hosted a number of matches during the Rugby World Cup.

Overview and Scrutiny Committee played an important role in monitoring preparations for Gloucester's host City status and will take a keen interest in ensuring that the promises of the Rugby World Cup Legacy Group are delivered in 2016-17.

SECTION 3 – SPOTLIGHT ON OUR PARTNERS

Performance Monitoring

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



Streetcare, which is provided to the Council by Amey, is such a highly visible service that it always stimulates robust debate from Members when it is monitored annually.

In June 2015 the Committee examined the annual report of the Strategic Streetcare Partnership which included key performance indicators for the service and information on Amey's future service delivery plans.

An outcome from the discussion was a recommendation that there should be publicity to make Gloucester residents aware of the range of items that could be recycled. The minutes can be found [here](#).



Streetcare matters were also discussed in November 2015 when the Committee received a briefing from the Cabinet Member for Environment on progress made by Amey towards meeting their budget savings target.

Spotlight on Civica UK Limited - Revenues and Benefits Partnership

In July 2015, the Committee examined Civica's performance in managing the Council's Revenues and Benefits service. Members considered:-

- Goals of the Partnership
- Achievements against the Goals
- Partnership Principles
- Highlights of the Partnership's Performance
- Future plans

During the discussion Members explored how the Introduction of Real Time Information (RTI) had impacted on the way applications were assessed.



Spotlight on Civica UK Limited - IT Partnership



Overview and Scrutiny Committee understands the importance of having a dynamic and fit for purpose IT service which meets the business needs of the organisation.

In July 2015 the Committee monitored the partnership and considered the highlights of its performance including management disciplines introduced.

Cyber security issues were a hot topic with Members keen to hear what actions had been taken by Civica following a major incident in 2014 and what lessons had been learned from the experience.

The detailed minutes can be read [here](#).

Spotlight on Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust

Health and inequality issues were a key theme when the Committee reviewed the progress of Aspire Sports and Cultural Trust in October 2015. Members were pleased to note the part that the Trust played in improving the well-being of residents in the City.



Spotlight on Gloucester City Homes



In March 2015, the City Council transferred the ownership of its housing stock to Gloucester City Homes when the organisation became a registered housing provider.

Some 12 months later the Committee was pleased to receive a presentation from Gloucester City Homes on progress made.

The Committee monitored actions taken against each of the 8 promises made by the organisation. During the session, Members were informed that Gloucester City Homes had been awarded a G1 rating for governance by the Homes and Communities – its highest rating – and a V2 rating for financial stability. This was regarded as a strong and positive outcome for an organisation which was less than 12 months old.

Inevitably, the discussion sparked a debate on the shortage of affordable housing in the City.

SECTION 4 - 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 2015 the Committee welcomed all the Cabinet Members to a meeting set aside for consideration of the City Council's draft money plan for 2016-21 and budget proposals for consultation for the year 2016-17.

Each Cabinet Member presented their portfolio in turn against a background of questions pre-prepared 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.

The minutes from the meeting can be read [here](#).



SECTION 5 - SPEAKING UP – SCRUTINY’S ROLE IN CONSULTATION

Introduction

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 2015-16 are detailed below:-

Hot Topic - Shopmobility Service Options Appraisal – October 2015



Public users of the Shopmobility service were in attendance when the Committee considered a report outlining options for the service as the Council could not continue to fund it in its existing format.

This was a highly controversial and emotive subject as the service was seen as a lifeline for many Gloucester residents. There was a long and impassioned debate on the report which can be read [here](#).

Asset Management Strategy 2016-2021 – January 2016

The asset management portfolio is made up of key sites and properties in the City Centre and some of the properties make a substantial contribution to the Council’s revenue streams. The strategy looked at balancing service delivery whilst continuing to help to deliver the Council’s ambitions in terms of the key regeneration sites in the City. After robust questioning of the Cabinet Member the Committee was pleased to endorse the strategy. The full text of the debate can be read [here](#).

Housing Delivery in Gloucester – January 2016

The need for new housing and Gloucester’s designation as a ‘Gloucester Growth Housing Zone’ were debated in January 2016 when the Committee examined a report which set out how the Council would meet its housing need up to 2031. The full text of the debate can be read [here](#).



Strategy for Cladding ‘Ugly’ Buildings – January 2016



In January 2016 the Committee debated plans to treat unattractive facades within the City Centre. This sparked a lively debate with Members assessing the costs and the pros and cons of such treatments.

On this occasion, the Committee was unable to reach a consensus view with them being split on their opinions of the effectiveness of cladding.

Cultural Strategy – March 2016



A new Cultural Strategy was one of the hot topics for the Committee in March 2016. The current Strategy had not been refreshed since 2007. The new Strategy identified 6 key objectives and informed Members of the proposed establishment of a Cultural Board. Members were keen that ‘culture’ reflected diversity and was not simply focused on art and music. It was also considered that the new strategy should cater for all sectors of the community and that no residents were marginalized.

SECTION 6 - CALL-IN

Introduction

During 2015-16 there was one call-in of a Cabinet decision regarding Voluntary and Community Sector Funding 2014-16 and a proposal for 2016-17 funding.

Grounds for Call-In

The call-in was made on the following grounds:-

1. There was insufficient detail in the report for Cabinet to take a decision.
2. Grants and Community Services Forum had not been consulted on the proposals as set out in the Constitution and there has been no detailed consultation with the voluntary organisations through the Forum or elsewhere on the detail of the proposals.
3. Councillors had not been formally consulted about proposed changes to the Members' Allocation Fund.
4. There had been no People Impact Assessment carried out.
5. The effects of the change of funding to individual groups had not been considered.
6. Groups who worked across ward boundaries would now have to apply to a number of Members instead of applying to a central point as had been the position in the past.
7. There was no demonstration in the report of how the Council's vision and priorities had been met by the change or how that would be monitored or measured.
8. The shift towards Councillors making grants was less fair and transparent as there was minimal documentation and oversight.

Decision of Overview and Scrutiny Committee

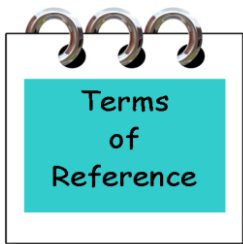
After careful and full examination of the facts the Committee voted not to accept the call-in, and the Cabinet decision was implemented without further delay.

SECTION 7 - 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 detailing findings and recommendations.

Some 6 months later progress on implementing the recommendations is monitored by the Committee. Overview and Scrutiny Committee then has the powers to request further monitoring if required.

In 2015-16 the Committee ran two Task and Finish Groups:-

Proposed Actions to Improve Housing Conditions in the Private Rented Sector (concluded in February 2016)

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.***

Recommendations from the Review



1. The current programme of proactive work to improve the worst privately rented accommodation in HMOs should be maintained into the future.
2. Funding to support the Private Sector Housing Officer's work should continue until at least April 2017 to allow these improvements to be sustained into the future.
3. The City Council should await the outcome of the recent Government consultation on extending mandatory HMO licensing before taking any further steps to introduce a discretionary licensing scheme.

The recommendations will be presented to Cabinet in July 2016.

The Centre for Public Scrutiny, the leading national body for promoting and supporting excellence in governance and scrutiny, has highlighted the study as an example of good and effective scrutiny.

The second Task and Finish Group focused on employment and skills opportunities for young people.

Membership: Councillor McLellan (Chair), Councillor Lewis, Councillor Hampson and Councillor Pearsall

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

To identify barriers to young people reaching their potential

Recommendations from the Review

1. Careers Advice and Guidance

Consideration to be given to introducing a Gloucester careers kite mark in partnership with the County Council and other interested bodies.

2. Partnership Working – careers events

Consideration to be given to the City Council hosting an 'Ambitions' type event, similar to that operated at Stroud, with the help of sponsors and interested bodies. There could also be participation in the 'Skills Fest' event.

3. Co-ordinated approach

Consideration to be given to the City and County Council working together to identify vulnerable young people in families receiving support from the City Council, Families First, Department of Work and Pensions and the Youth Support Team, in order to develop their employability skills and experience.

4. Mock Interviews, 'Dragon's Den' scenarios

Consideration to be given to Gloucester City Council exploring its corporate social responsibilities and allowing staff and Councillors to participate in mock interviews and 'Dragon's Den' scenarios as part of its Volunteering Scheme.

5. Work Experience

Using the contact networks of the Federation of Small Businesses, Major Employers' Group and City Centre Retail Partnership, more work experience opportunities should be given to young people (up to the age of 24). This would also include the City and County Council and their partners. Companies should also be encouraged to have 'open days'.

6. Apprenticeships

Small businesses could be encouraged to offer apprenticeships, possibly on a shared basis, using the network of the Federation of Small Businesses.



7. Employment and Training Packages for new employers coming to Gloucester

Consideration should be given to the City Council including in its Local Plan an obligation for developers to prepare employment and skills plans with the help of the City Council and other key partners. Such plans would set out the type of training and employment opportunities that would be offered by the developer such as apprenticeships, training placements, work experience, and the use of trades in the local area. This could be a recommendation to Planning Policy Sub-Committee and also reflected in the Joint Core Strategy. New investors or employers moving to the City should also be approached by the City Council to see what the Council, in conjunction with partners, could do to assist them.

8. Developing and Upskilling Employees

Consideration should be given to the City and County Council promoting opportunities to develop and upskill staff, particularly those in the retail sector, in partnership with the Major Employers' Group, Federation of Small Businesses and the City Centre Retail Partnership.

9. Travel

Consideration should be given to the City Council including in its Local Plan an obligation for new employers coming to Gloucester to have their own travel schemes to assist employees in getting to work, particularly those living in rural areas. This could be a recommendation to Planning Policy Sub-Committee. This could include providing transport for the first few months to allow workers to explore car sharing alternatives, etc.

10. City Council's Website

The City Council's website should have links to 'Yes2Jobs', Jobs Centre Plus and any other relevant websites.

The report will be presented to Cabinet in July 2016.

After endorsing the report, the Committee recommended that a further study be commissioned in the next municipal year concentrating on working closely with young people to help them to reach their potential.



SECTION 8 - CHALLENGES FOR 2016-17

Looking Ahead

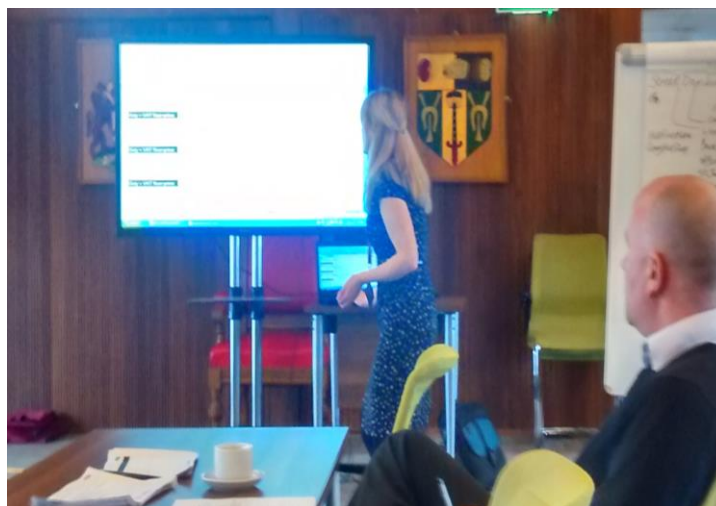
In the new municipal year 2016-17, the Committee welcomes 9 new Members to the Committee, including a new Chair, Vice-Chair and Spokesperson.

Professional training has been scheduled for June 2016 with the Centre for Public Scrutiny, the national body for promoting and supporting excellence in governance and scrutiny.

Following the local elections in May 2016, Members were elected for a 4 year term with the Conservative Group gaining the majority of seats on the Council and forming an administration. Scrutiny's role as a critical friend to the organisation is of vital importance and the Committee will continue to challenge, change and make a difference with robust and rigorous examination of the Council's partners and other stakeholders and the decisions of Cabinet.

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 Task and Finish Group projects.

It is intended to look at ways to increase public engagement with Overview and Scrutiny in 2016-17 and to organise more one off events similar to the workshop on alcohol.



Successful Scrutiny Makes a Difference!

SECTION 9 - MEMBERS' ATTENDANCE RECORD

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE 2015-16

Nature of Meeting	Date of Meeting
Ordinary business	15 June 2015
Ordinary business	13 July 2015
Ordinary business	14 September 2015
Ordinary business	19 October 2015
Ordinary business	9 November 2015
Ordinary business	30 November 2015
Budget proposals and consultation	7 December 2015
Ordinary business	11 January 2016
Ordinary business	8 February 2016
Ordinary business	7 March 2016
Call-In	22 March 2016
Name of Councillor	Meetings attended (out of a maximum of 10 ordinary meetings)
Councillor Janet Lugg (Chair)	10
Councillor Neil Hampson (Vice-Chair)	9
Councillor Hannah Norman (Spokesperson)	9
Councillor Kate Haigh	10
Councillor Andrew Gravells	8
Councillor Andrew Lewis	8
Councillor Susan Witts	10
Councillor Gerald Dee	8
Councillor Sebastian Field*	4
Councillor Jim Beeley*	6
Councillor Said Hansdot	8
Councillor Laura Pearsall	8
Councillor Tarren Randle	5
Councillor Paul Toleman	9
Councillor Chris Etheridge	10

** Councillors Field and Beeley were Mayor and Sheriff during the 2015-2016 municipal year and civic events prevented their attendance at some meetings*



Gloucester **City Council**

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