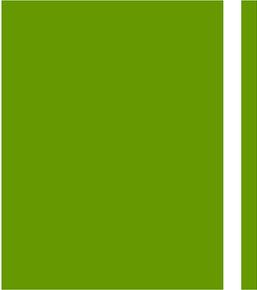


Scrutiny Annual Report 2014 – 2015 (a summary of highlights)



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1. Foreword

Chair of Overview and Scrutiny Committee:
Councillor Tim Harman



I am pleased to present the Overview and Scrutiny annual report for 2014-15.

The role of the committee is to co-ordinate the Overview and Scrutiny function of the Council; which it does by commissioning scrutiny task groups to carry out detailed work and ensuring that they have clear Terms of Reference. It is also responsible for receiving call-ins of Cabinet decisions and determining how they should be dealt with.

2014-15 has been a busy year with the final reports from the Budget Scrutiny, Members' ICT Policy, Public Art Governance and Shopmobility scrutiny task groups having gone to Cabinet. There are two task groups; the Cheltenham Spa Railway and Cycling and Walking, which are preparing to take their recommendations to Cabinet in October 2015 and a task group has also been established with Gloucester City Council to undertake joint scrutiny of Broadband.

The work of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee is not limited to services delivered by Cheltenham Borough Council and with this in mind the committee has, over the last year, met with the Police and Crime Commissioner and received a presentation from the Lido Trust. It also looks forward to future visits from Severn Trent Water to discuss lessons learned following major works throughout the town and the Gloucestershire Hospitals Trust who have been invited to discuss future plans for hospitals across Gloucestershire.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank, not just members of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee, but members from across the council who have contributed to the scrutiny process, as well as the officers who have supported the Committee and various task groups.

The committee will continue to scrutinise issues which are important to the town and I would encourage members and residents to raise issues that, if appropriate, the Committee or a task group, can scrutinise further.

2. Andrew North Chief Executive



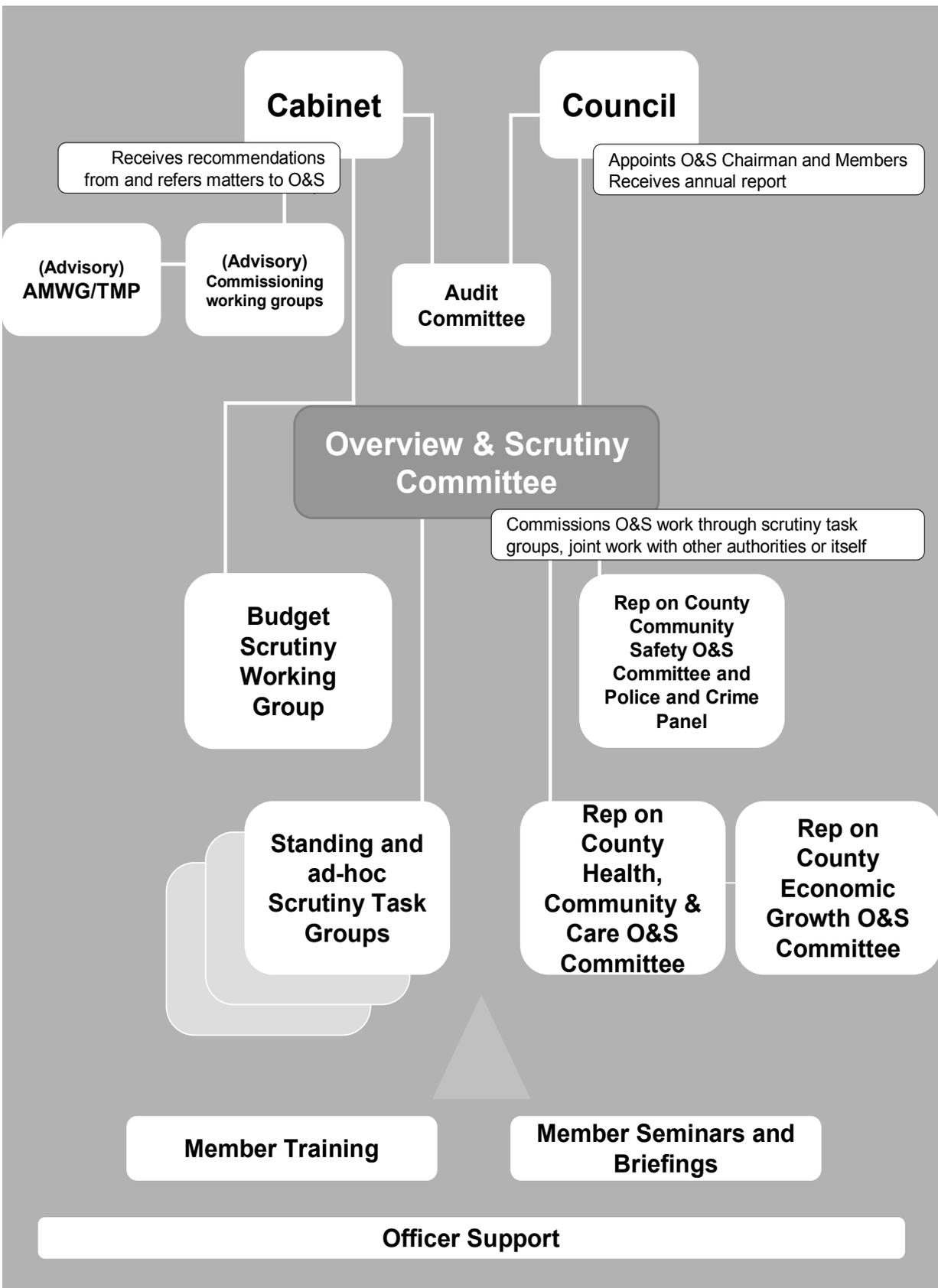
I said in my introduction last year that “effective Overview and Scrutiny is a vital part of local democracy as it plays a key role in holding the Cabinet, officers and the wider council to account. It is important therefore to reflect on how well it has done this, as well as what difference it has made to the community at large.” We had the opportunity to do this in September 2014 when the council invited a peer challenge team led by LGA to visit the council for 3 days to provide an external ‘health-check’ of the organisation. The peer challenge team were asked specifically to look at the effectiveness of the council’s governance arrangements and scrutiny.

I am pleased to say that overall the peer group concluded that scrutiny was working well under the new arrangements and they were impressed by the achievements to date by scrutiny task groups which were set out in the annual report. One improvement area that they identified was in the area of the scrutiny work programme which they felt needed to be rationalised. They encouraged members to feed into the process and challenge themselves when devising the work programme to ensure scrutiny’s limited resources were focussing on the high value areas. They also recommended that the council needed to make more use of the skills of the members and engage a wider group of members into the scrutiny process. The outcome of the review was an action plan which O&S are now monitoring. Actions have included a Members’ skills audit and O&S has been reviewing Project Initiation Documents (PIDS) to assess their level of involvement in projects going forward.

Members have honed their scrutiny skills on a number of scrutiny task groups which have delivered benefits for the council and the community it serves. The council is going through a period of major change with commissioning, shared services, devolution and new models for delivering services all on the agenda. All this in a climate of continuing financial pressures and reductions in government funding. The challenge for scrutiny members is to ensure they play an active role in all these change programmes and help to shape the future models, particularly in ensuring the appropriate scrutiny arrangements are in place and in monitoring delivery of agreed benefits.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Andrew North'. The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

3. Overview and Scrutiny Structure



Scrutiny Task Groups 2014-15

4.0 Budget scrutiny working group Chairman: Councillor Chris Nelson

The budget scrutiny working group forms a permanent part of the scrutiny arrangements at Cheltenham Borough Council. The rationale being that the budget is a complex area that cannot be scrutinised effectively as a one-off exercise. Members of this working group have built up their expertise and understanding of financial matters so that they can review the budget strategy, the bridging the gap programme and be in a position to respond to the budget proposals as well as scrutinising the business cases of major projects within the commissioning framework.

Chair of the working group, Councillor Chris Nelson said that "The Budget Scrutiny Working Group continues to do good work, examining key Council budgetary proposals and contributing to the formulation of important Council initiatives that have significant financial implications (such as the recent REST management review). The Working Group has also played its part in testing the value for money of the authority's accommodation strategy and investigating the reasons for the financial over-spend associated with the Wilson Art Gallery and Museum extension project."

The working group considered the budget proposals at their meeting in January 2015 and as a result made a number of recommendations to O&S which were forwarded to Cabinet. These recommendations covered their views on the use of the New Homes Bonus, the council tax freeze, pooled business rates and the use of the capital receipts from North Place. They were all taken account of in the final budget proposals to Council in February and the Cabinet Member Finance thanked the group for their valuable input.

During the year the budget scrutiny working group have been responsive to urgent requests and have scrutinised the accommodation strategy in some detail and the financial aspects of the REST project before that went to Council. They have now been given an important action by Council to ensure that the financial benefits of the REST project are delivered.

The Director of Resources also commented that " this has been a very valuable process which has given members an opportunity to input into the development of the budget proposals and key initiatives which has added value to the process. The financial position remains very challenging and it is very both helpful and important to have a forum for deeper consideration of the issues facing the council and wider member influence over the strategy for dealing with it."

4.1 Members' ICT Policy Scrutiny Task Group Chair: Councillor Matt Babbage

Task group members: Councillors Matt Babbage, Chris Mason, John Payne, Dan Murch and Max Wilkinson

Officer support: Mark Sheldon, Dan Hares and Rosalind Reeves

The Members ICT Policy task group was set up to approve the policy which had been drafted to support the continued roll-out of iPads to members. The group held a single meeting, at which it agreed the policy and scrutinised the business case for the roll out.

The policy was adopted in April 2015 and at present, 30 of 40 councillors have opted to loan a council Pad. The resulting print savings will cover the cost of the roll out and there are the added benefits to the environment given the reduction in paper copies being produced. The working group also recommended that Members' ICT should be regularly reviewed to ensure that our members can continue to take advantage of new technology as it becomes available.

4.2 Public Art governance Scrutiny Task Group



Task group members: John Payne and Chris Ryder
Officer support: Wilf Tomaney, Shirin Wotherspoon and Rosalind Reeves

In November 2014 Overview & Scrutiny Committee requested that a workshop be set up where scrutiny members could meet with members of the Public Art Panel to review the governance of the panel. The task

group commended the work of the panel and made 9 recommendations relating to governance which included;

- Revised terms of reference for the panel
- Extending the membership of the panel
- Allocation of funding to allow for the Public Art Strategy to be refreshed
- Clarity as to who should be making decisions and when they should be publicised.

The recommendations were welcomed by the Cabinet Member Healthy Lifestyles in February 2015 and in March 2015 recommendations were approved with only minor amendments.

Since the recommendations were accepted a number of decisions have been published which has made the work of the Public Art Panel more transparent.

4.3 Shopmobility Scrutiny Task Group Chair: Councillor Jacky Fletcher

Task group members: Councillors Jacky Fletcher, John Payne and Louis Savage

Officer support: Wilf Tomaney and Rosalind Reeves

The Shopmobility unit was served notice to quit its existing premises in the Beechwood Arcade by June 2015, though it was subsequently given leave to remain until November 2015. In view of the urgency, the task group was set up by the Chief Executive in consultation with the chair and vice-chair of the O&S committee, as permitted by the constitution.



The review included assessment of the current site, staffing and budgets, charges for the service, customer base, advertising and promotion and research into the Shopmobility brand in other towns. The group worked quickly, meeting in June and agreeing their recommendations in time for O&S in June and Cabinet in July.

The group felt that it was vital that the service continue to be provided and moving

forward the service would need to fully exploit opportunities with partners and increase its income by promoting the service more widely. One of the recommendations from the group was therefore to consider strategies to enhance the service including partnership options with other local service providers. The recommendations were agreed by the O&S Committee and subsequently noted by Cabinet in July 2015.

The task group are pleased to see that there is now a public consultation on the service and the way it is provided, as well as its future location and look forward to learning the outcome.

4.4 Cheltenham Spa Railway Station Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Roger Whyborn

Task group members: Councillors Flo Clucas, Chris Mason, Dan Murch, John Payne and Max Wilkinson

Officer support: Jeremy Williamson (Cheltenham Development Task Force) and Saira Malin

Initiated in September 2014, the task group were asked to better understand the franchise renewal process. The group were also tasked with developing a wish-list of improvements to the station, transport links and rail service itself and establish if and how they were being progressed. In April 2015 the DfT extended the London train service franchise with the existing franchisee, First Great Western, by a period of three and a half years and therefore the task group did not undertake to understand the franchise renewal process further and instead focussed on the other objectives.

Having met with a variety of experts, including representatives from Network Rail, First Great Western and Stagecoach West; the group have agreed a number of recommendations which will be considered by Cabinet in October.



4.5 Cycling and Walking Scrutiny Task Group

Chair: Councillor Max Wilkinson

Task group members: Councillors Chris Ryder, Helena McCloskey, Barbara Driver and Rob Reid

Co-opted members: John Mallows (Cheltenham and Tewkesbury Cycling campaign), Bronwen Thornton (Walk21) and John Newbury (Living Streets)

Officer support: Rhonda Tauman, Wilf Tomaney and Tess Beck



Set up in September 2014 following the submission of a 'scrutiny topic registration form', the task group were tasked with identifying opportunities for improving provision for cycling and walking in Cheltenham and making recommendations which would facilitate these improvements.

The group met with a variety of officers from the borough and county, as well as seeking advice from experts and they even undertook a field trip to Bristol to see what could be achieved through implementing a cycling and walking

strategy supported by a team of dedicated cycling officers at Bristol City Council.

The task group have devised a number of recommendations and will be tabling these with Cabinet in October.

This task group demonstrated the value that co-opted members can add to the work of a task group given their specialist knowledge.

Other scrutiny successes

5.0 LGA Peer Review

In September 2014 the council invited a peer challenge team led by the LGA to provide an external 'health-check' of the organisation and were asked specifically to look at the effectiveness of the council's governance and scrutiny arrangements.

Overall, the peer team concluded that scrutiny was working well under the new arrangements; however, they also identified areas for improvement in relation to the scrutiny work programme which they felt needed to be rationalised.

They suggested that the work programme should focus on the high value areas, given the limited resources and they also recommended that the council needed to make more use of the skills of the members and engage a wider group of members into the scrutiny process. Officers developed an action plan which O&S were tasked with monitoring and actions included a Members' skills audit and O&S reviewing Project Initiation Documents (PIDS) to decide their level of involvement in projects.

5.1 Presentation by Sandford Lido Trust

Representatives of the Sandford Lido Trust were invited to present their future plans to the Overview and Scrutiny Committee. The committee learned that the Lido, could on any given day, attract as many as 4000 visitors and the Trust were able to raise the issue of their lease. With only 5 years remaining, they felt it might hinder their ability to apply for funding and the committee requested that the relevant officers make contact with the Trust in order to open negotiations on the renewal/renegotiation of the lease.

5.2 Q&A session with Police and Crime Commissioner

Members welcomed the opportunity to meet with Martin Surl, the Police and Crime Commissioner for Gloucestershire. Whilst responsibility for the scrutiny of this role officially lies with the Police and Crime Panel at County level, the Commissioner was generous enough to attend a meeting of the Committee and answer questions from members about current issues and future plans for policing of the Cheltenham area.

7. Overview and Scrutiny – what's next?

- We are about to commence joint scrutiny of broadband with Gloucester City Council.

- As part of Democracy Week (12-18 October 2015) we will be promoting scrutiny as a means for the wider public to raise issues and get involved in the work of the council.
- The NHS Trust will be attending a future meeting of the Committee to discuss plans for Gloucestershire Hospitals (a date is yet to be agreed).
- An introduction to Overview and Scrutiny is being planned for after the 2016 elections, as part of the Members Induction programme to develop members' skills and understanding of the scrutiny process. Sessions will also be arranged for Officers.
- We would welcome any suggestions or thoughts on how we can make the overview and scrutiny process better. Please contact one of the Democratic Services team.

8. Contacts

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SCRUTINY TOPIC REGISTRATION



Do YOU have a topic that you think Cheltenham Borough Council should scrutinise? Please fill out the following form and return to Democratic Services.

Date:	
Name of person proposing topic:	
Contact details: email and telephone no:	
Suggested title of topic:	
What is the issue that scrutiny needs to address?	
What do you feel could be achieved by a scrutiny review (outcomes)	
If there a strict time constraint?	
Is the topic important to the people of Cheltenham?	
Does the topic involve a poorly performing service or high public dissatisfaction with a service?	
Is it related to the Council's corporate objectives?	
Any other comments:	